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# WITH THE HEAVIES IN FLANDERS

H. F. BERDINNER.





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# **WITH THE HEAVIES IN FLANDERS**











*Yours to the last round,*

*Harold J. Berdine*

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# WITH THE HEAVIES IN FLANDERS

1914-'15-'16-'17-'18-'19

A RECORD OF THE ACTIVE SERVICE OF THE  
24<sup>TH</sup> HEAVY BATTERY R.G.A.

BY  
HAROLD F. BERDINNER

*(Wireless Operator to the Battery,  
1916-1919)*

THE BOTOLPH PRINTING WORKS  
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*March 16th, 1922*



*To those great hearts who fell out by  
the way that others might march  
on, this humble work is dedicated.*

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## Foreword

THE idea of compiling a diary developed immediately after the declaration of the Armistice.

Considering that the battery was one of but six 60-pounder batteries in the Regular Army of 1914, and that it had fought its way in Flanders from the second month of the war till the hour of victory, there was every claim and justification to commence a history which should endeavour to pay tribute to those who helped substantiate the traditions of such a unit.

Whilst still with the battery the compiler's effort was concerned with gathering from the older members some sequence of incidents which would add a touch of human interest to the notes already contained in the battery log-books. These latter records, particularly those written by Major E. Miles, M.C., have been essential to the accuracy of the early part of this compilation. But that these digests of service were necessarily terse in purport is an obvious remark. The very brevity indicates the demands of time to other and more important duties which fell to the lot of the successive battery commanders.

Meetings of those who remained from the party which crossed to France on September 9th, 1914, were therefore called, and an attempt made to tabulate incidents in regard to their exact date. Although the consideration of the diary as a business project was uppermost at these meetings, the old times were recalled with rare interest and gusto, and if any stimulus had been needed to further the writing, it was undoubtedly supplied on these occasions.

Sympathetic supervision and guidance by Major J. G. C. Leech and Captain G. Grice were invaluable at this

## FOREWORD

early period. The writer is also indebted to Mr. S. T. Bennell, Sergeant A. R. Hooper and Sergeant W. J. Kitchener, particularly for help at the beginning of the book. From the preparation of the battle of the Somme till the end, however, the compiler has relied on his own private diary, for notes in the logs resolve themselves into a monotonous repetition of map co-ordinates and aggregates of rounds fired.

Mr. J. B. Finch was kind enough to supply some of the photographs after a tour of the battle-field in 1919. Most of them bring back a wave of vivid recollections, some pleasant and others decidedly the reverse.

H.F.B.

Charlton, London, S.E.7.

# Compilation of Diary : 24th Heavy Battery, R.G.A.

1914

*30th May.* Battery left Woolwich on this date for annual training at Salisbury Plain. Arrived Bulford Camp, Salisbury, afternoon.

*11th June.* Took part in a review at Tidworth.

*3rd July.* Battery entrained at Bulford in the evening and arrived at Okehampton on morning of July 4th for annual gun practice, subsequently qualifying as a first-class battery.

*17th July.* Re-arrived at Bulford on morning of the 18th and continued battery training.

*3rd August.* Struck camp and returned to Woolwich, arriving from Waterloo by route march.

*4th August.* 7 p.m. Order to mobilise received.

*19th August.* Right and left sections entrained. Battery arrived at Cambridge.

*21st August.* All officers and other ranks inoculated (anti-typhoid), and battery declared "On Active Service."

*7th September.* Orders received to hold battery in readiness to entrain.

*9th September.* Battery left Cambridge for Southampton. Headquarters and right section embarked on s.s. *Caledonian*, left section and ammunition column on s.s. *Rowanmore*, both ships sailing about 8 p.m.

## OFFICERS.

Major H. E. J. Brake, C.B., D.S.O., commanding.

Captain E. Miles.

Lieut. W. A. O. C. Mackintosh.

Lieut. M. G. E. Walker.

Lieut. S. D. Douglas-Jones.



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Lieut. J. W. Cardew (ammunition column).

Strength of battery, 165 ; ammunition column, 29 ; horses, 148.

*11th September.* A long and rather tedious journey on the boats. On the 11th both ships reached mouth of Loire and anchored.

*12th September.* Proceeded up river to St. Nazaire and entered dock. Left section and ammunition column landed. Interpreter Paul O'Reilly attached for duty.

*13th September.* *Caledonian* entered dock, unloading at 9 a.m., but owing to delay in getting floating crane alongside, the guns were not unshipped till 6 p.m.

*13th-15th September.* Train journey to Château Thierry.

The battery had a great reception by the inhabitants on landing in the country, and were everywhere cheered by enthusiastic crowds. The train itself was bedecked with flowers and flags, and at every turn the troops found how welcome was the invitation and thanks of La France. One driver distinguished himself by leaving the train without permission. He was placed under arrest, but as it was shown afterwards that the means of exit was provided by a horse's hind leg, the sentence was withdrawn, though the train had had to be stopped and backed some little distance. There was an early exchange of souvenirs for food.

*15th September.* Château Thierry on River Marne reached. Marched with remainder of 6th Division Artillery at 5.40 p.m., reaching Coincy at 9 p.m. Men were billeted, and guns parked in the street. Men, horses and guns were still the object of curiosity and admiration. The previous good weather held fine, and men were keen with the prospect of action in the near future.

*16th September.* On the march again at 8 a.m. and joined rest of 6th Division at Rocourt en route for

## WITH THE HEAVIES

Vint Arcy. Battery ordered to leave 6th Division and march with all speed to Wasseny for attachment to 5th Division. Arrived at 5 p.m. and came into action facing N.N.E. near 108th Heavy Battery, in relief of 31st Heavies moved to Jury. Position in front of Serches.

Synopsis of speech made by Major H. E. J. Brake, C.B., D.S.O., commanding 24th Heavy Battery, in the streets of Château Thierry before the battery went into action. (Gathered from various men present.)

"I have had previous war experience, but none of a European war. Therefore one cannot say exactly how things will turn out. There is a vast difference between this war and the Boer War or frontier fighting. But you are to put your trust in me, obey orders and do your duty.

"We are fighting in a friendly country. The people you meet will be friends, and you will do nothing to be ashamed of. If you should come across a Hun, however, treat him as a Hun should be treated.

"I am proud to have been sent out in command of you men; it is the proudest moment of my life to be in command of such a battery, and I hope no one will give me cause to regret my statement."

*16th September.* This night was the first one in action for the battery, and the prevailing conditions tested the resources of men and horses to the utmost. Trails were not dropped till dusk; it was raining hard and the "pull-in" was a difficult one. The men had had a thirty-five kilo. march, so it was decided to wait till morning for digging-in, and the men slept round the guns, thoroughly tired with the day's exertions. 31st H.B. were pulling out as the battery arrived. First shot, "A" gun misfired, "B" sub-section fired. Layer of the first gun, Gunner J. Young. First guard mounted

## WITH THE HEAVIES

in France (battery in action), Bombardier Pitches, Gunners Kitchener, Lane and Magner.

*17th September.* On with usual work; counter-battery and working parties north of and behind the Chivres Spur, north of River Aisne; co-operation with aeroplanes. The first plane sent out rose a few hundred feet and then turned turtle.

*18th September.* Attached to 4th Division and marched 3 p.m. to Jury, and at dusk to prepared position 600 yards short of Le Pavillon Farm, and entrenched. Transport and the cooks were left behind with orders to rejoin the Battery next morning. This party, including Q.M.S. Murphy, Corporal Bennell, Gunners West, King, Squires, Privates Querney and Ayres, R.A.M.C., and Driver Fox, A.S.C., reached Jury on the night of the 18th, a night pitch black and teeming with rain. Having lost the way—a very simple accomplishment in France—they slept as well as possible, and were very relieved to meet Corporal Payne on the morning of the 19th. First aeroplane shoot; observations were sent by means of Verey lights. The disadvantage was the vagueness of signals such as “over” and “short.” When wireless came to be used afterwards, corrections to a few yards were possible.

*19th September.* Orders received to economise in ammunition. The standard of ammunition at this time was none too good. At one period the amount was limited to five rounds per day, and during ten days the left section did not fire a shot.

*20th September.* Ordered to fire on what appeared to be a Zeppelin beyond Celles.

*22nd September.* Limbered up and advanced to prepared position 300 yards north-east of Le Pavillon Farm—ground very soft and another difficult pull-in.

*23rd September.* Shelled concealed battery to right of Pont Rouge, observation being directed by aeroplane, and in response to a request from 12th Infantry Brigade (Essex), shelled south end and valley west of Vregny, where a German gun, maxims and infantry were reported



BRIG.-GENERAL H. E. J. BRAKE, 'C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O.



## WITH THE HEAVIES

to be firing on our trenches. Observation Officer Lieut. Douglas-Jones crossed the river to advanced trenches of 10th Infantry Brigade and brought back important information regarding positions held by the Germans.

*26th September.* Expected attack on the left by the French. Battery ranged by aeroplane on Pont Rouge and at 4 p.m. fired bursts of shrapnel to embarrass the enemy and to prevent his attacking our trenches. On this day took place the first aeroplane shoot by means of wireless communication in which the battery co-operated. This was probably the first shoot of its kind conducted with a heavy battery in France, and General Lord French was himself present during the operations. Cloth ground-strips were not in use at this time, and Verey lights were fired from the ground position to attract the attention of the aeroplane. The Commander-in-Chief also visited the observation post. As this post was heavily shelled on the following day the question prompts itself that the Hun secret service might have discovered that a distinguished general was to visit this point, and may have been a day out in their reckoning of the date. General French also gave Major Brake some English newspapers, the first received in France by the battery.

*27th September.* First casualties of the battery.

In the morning fire was opened on batteries west and east of Pont Rouge to relieve the French on our left, whose trenches were being shelled from this direction.

A barn and haystack near to the guns were used as a flank observation post. Testing communication between guns and O.P. about 9.30 on this Sunday morning, and their minds doubtless going back to the old Church Parades on Woolwich Common, the telephonists at either end were passing time in conversation by wishing that the celebrated R.A. band was in attendance to liven things up a bit. "And I bet the German band would also liven things up!" remarked the telephonist from the guns.

Strange it was that comedy should be the premonitor



## WITH THE HEAVIES

of tragedy, for at 9.50 a.m. shelling commenced, and several rounds fell to the right flank of the O.P. in the direction of the guns. The O.P. itself, however, appeared to be the objective, for the next rounds dropped near to the haystack and one went clean through, wounding Major De Somerez, of 108th Heavy Battery, who was using the same observation post. The men then moved to the rear of the barn, but unhappily a shell landed through the roof and exploded right amongst the small party, killing Gunners E. Cross and J. R. Stephens and wounding four others—Corporal F. Mutimer, Bombardier P. Mayes and Gunners J. Swinburne and E. Baker. A corporal of 108th H.B. had been killed also, but those not so seriously wounded stuck to their posts and rendered such aid as was possible. Corporal Mutimer crawled away in the direction of the guns for stretchers and some more bandages. This heroic undertaking was accomplished and Corporal Mutimer reached the guns, but owing to the increased severity of the shelling it was impossible to regain the scene of tragedy. Meanwhile Gunners Swinburne and Baker endeavoured to make an improvised stretcher from two rifles, but Gunner Cross could not be removed under such heavy shell fire, and died twenty minutes later.

Major De Somerez, of 108th H.B., stayed till the dead had been covered and the wounded attended to, then ordered the party to retire to the guns. Seventy-six shells had fallen during one hour and a half, a period when minutes seemed hours to those at the observation post. These were the first casualties sustained by the battery in France. A party went up at dusk to collect the dead, and Gunners E. Cross and J. R. Stephens were buried at La Pavillon Farm between 6 and 7 in the evening. The service was a most impressive one, and recollections of the scene remain vividly in the minds of all those present. The dim rays of two lanterns gave all the light necessary. One could just discern the outline of the Army Chaplain as he read the burial

## WITH THE HEAVIES

service for these two men, the first in the battery to make the supreme sacrifice.

Said Major Brake: "I have lost two men. This loss shall be repaid two-hundredfold."

For his gallant endeavour to bring assistance to his comrades, Corporal Mutimer was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal. At the same time of this award, Sergeant Davidson also received the D.C.M. for good work and devotion to duty.

The position of the guns was moved, the men entrenching all night, and then, one hour before dawn of the 28th, the battery was ordered to march to a position south of Jury, and came into action and entrenched.

*28th-30th September.* Principally on counter-battery work; shelled battery north of Vregny and a large barn, suspected as an observation post, and on the 20th co-operated with the French in an attack on the Cuffies-Perriere line.

*1st October.* This day provided a break in the weather, which till now had been good for artillery work and observation.

*3rd October.* Left 4th Division and rejoined 6th Division.

*4th-5th October.* Registration and counter-battery work.

*6th October.* Again attached to 4th Division on departure of 6th Division.

*7th-10th October.* Started march to Chouy at dusk, and arrived at dawn, concealing guns and transport from hostile aeroplane observation. Men had been without water and without real rest for a fortnight, and marching after the strain of action demanded a big effort. Yet through all the towns continued the same kindly welcome and sympathy from the French people. Youngsters begging for souvenirs and occasional visits to cafés and estaminets for coffees and the sampling of other liquids—these times were the first lessons in the

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French language, and men began to make their wants known; indeed, some were able to "compree" within a remarkably short space of time.

*8th October.* Chouy was left at 5 p.m., and a march made through the forest of Villers Cotterets, halting at Le Berval.

*9th October.* On next day through Orrouy and Bethisy on to Saintines, and from thence next day via Verberie to Longueil St. Marie, skirting the southern fringe of the forest of Compiègne, a difficult task at night. Difficulty was experienced with water for men and horses. It was not always easily found, and had to be examined and passed fit before using. In this mobile kind of warfare guns, even when on the move, had to be prepared for all emergencies, and on this particular line of march shells were fused ready for instant action should the situation so demand. Men had only one issue of clothing, that in which they stood, and shirts were often taken off, washed, dried and then put on again, the owners going without in the meantime. Marching was done at night, and what rest was possible taken during the day. Through Villers Cotterets, Le Berval, Gilucourt, Bethisy, Saintines—so the battery marched till Longueil St. Marie was reached, and both sections entrained for St. Omer, the comparative rest from marching being appreciated by all. At one town on the line of march a party was hastily formed to find the best exit out of the building for the purpose of "scrounging" and "seeing the town." Unfortunately for these worthies they were seen by Major Brake, who hurried back and ordered an immediate roll-call, at which some fifty or sixty men were conspicuous by their absence. They came to be known as the "loafing" party.

*11th October.* No definite news had been received of the movements or progress of the enemy, yet the very atmosphere suggested a possibility of impending battle. There was a tense uncertainty about the situation, revealed in the demeanour of the population, and at

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9 p.m. it was reported that patrols of German cavalry had reached Hazebrouck twelve kilometres away.

*12th October.* Marched with 6th Divisional Artillery towards Hazebrouck and come into action about a mile north of the town at La Kreule at 4 p.m. On this march, whilst watering the horses on the side of the road, a German aeroplane suddenly made its appearance just above, flying in the direction of St. Omer. The civilians at a house on the cross-roads were burying their boy in the garden. He had been killed by hostile shell-fire. On the return journey the 'plane was harassed by one of our own machines, which kept up a constant fire on the intruder. The pom-pom battery attached to our own battery also came into action, and with such good effect that the German was brought to earth. This was the first hostile 'plane that the battery saw brought down. Hazebrouck was reached without further incident at 4 o'clock in the afternoon, and the battery was ordered to billet in the convent. The guns, held in readiness about a mile north of the town, were dragged into the convent yard, a strangely inappropriate setting for the usual peaceful atmosphere of the quiet quadrangle. The occupants of the convent showed the utmost consideration and kindness to all, and a good night's sleep was enjoyed.

*13th October.* An early réveillé enabled the guns to be on the move once more at 7 a.m., and success in front allowed an advance through Borre to east of Pradelles, the battery pulling into a field. A hostile aeroplane appeared low down over the field soon after arrival, and the position being thought dangerous, a shift was made back to west of the village.

*14th October.* Limbered up again at 3 o'clock in the morning to move forward to positions east of Strazelle, being ordered to open fire at daybreak on enemy, who were said to be holding up our infantry at Bailleul. Ordered by G.O.C. to proceed to an entrenched position outside Strazelle and open fire as early as possible on

## WITH THE HEAVIES

the southern slopes of Bailleul, at the foot of which the Rifle Brigade was entrenched. Weather was rather misty, but field guns could be heard firing comparatively near. Orders were received to cease fire and advance to west of Nord Hele at 9 a.m. At 1 o'clock the guns rejoined the column in rear of the 2nd Brigade R.F.A., and marched to Outter Eteene. The activity of the enemy and a blockade of traffic on the road caused unavoidable delay, and destination was not reached till 5 p.m., the guns being parked in the road. The situation was none too safe, and patrols with rifles were pushed out to guard the roads at night. The horses stood hooked together with just the poles dropped, ready for moving at any minute, each driver doing an hour's piquet.

Thus in but three days eight different positions had been occupied. Warfare seemed composed of nothing else but a succession of moves with the constant danger of coming under hostile aeroplane observation. But with the limited strength of guns at disposal it was imperative to lead the Germans to suppose that we were as strong in artillery as we were actually weak. Therefore the need for so many moves. Such a game of bluff was only maintained by the ceaseless and indefatigable effort of all ranks. An armoured train, mounting two 6" mark VII and two 4.7" guns, is well remembered as travelling from Armentières and patrolling parallel to the line. It would constantly open fire in different positions to keep up this important game. By the men it was named "*H.M.S. Jellicoe and Drake.*"

15th October. Shortly after dinner the battery moved to Noote-Boom, where the column halted for further orders. As usual, the Germans were very active in the air, but during this halt a hostile 'plane was successfully engaged by anti-aircraft fire. The machine was believed to have descended in the enemy's lines. The Germans in these early times had an undoubted superiority in the air, and their scouts and observation machines were

## WITH THE HEAVIES

always in evidence when the weather permitted. Occasions such as the one described, however, proved that they could venture too far. By 4.30 p.m. the guns were again moving, and Le Grande Beaumont was eventually reached and orders awaited. On these marches meals were taken whenever a suitable opportunity presented itself. The regular routine was bacon and biscuits for breakfast, "bully" and biscuits for dinner, and biscuits and jam for tea. There was no Army issue of milk, and this luxury was dispensed with unless it was possible to buy it. Nevertheless, the health of the men, despite exposure and hard conditions, kept good. Matches were always very scarce, the first issue on the Aisne being eight per man. A few men were provided with boxes, and such men had to be found should a gunner or driver wish to use one of his eight means of ignition. On the Aisne also took place the first "pay out," each man receiving five francs. It was exceedingly hard to obtain change; it was just as difficult to find anything on which to spend money, except that many notes changed owners during the varying fortunes of "nap" or "pontoon," and one man lost the whole of his first pay in learning how not to play "solo." Not knowing a word of the language, one gunner visited a farm to buy some eggs. He accomplished this object by reproducing noises similar to the cackling of a hen. At this time the first issue of blankets, one per man, was sent out from England, a gift from the people at home.

*16th October.* Battery ordered to march at 5.20 a.m. to Le Crusebeau and there await orders. This town was reached by 6.45 a.m., and the guns were parked in an orchard and examined by an Ordnance officer.

*17th October.* On the following day a move was made to south of railway at Bac St. Maur, near Fleurbaix. Cavalry and infantry were engaged with the enemy immediately in front.

*18th October.* Marched at 9 a.m. through Fleurbaix. The town was in good order and condition, the civilians



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watching with curiosity the long line of guns and transport which passed. A halt was made one mile to the east of the town, and at 1.15 p.m. orders were received to march through Armentières to Point 63, near Ploegstreert for duty with the 4th Division. It was impossible to take the most direct route owing to the destruction of an important bridge just out of Armentières, so progress was made through Nieppe. The Belgian frontier was crossed at 3.30 p.m., Point 63 reached, and the position entrenched.

*19th October.* In action at 7 a.m., searching roads with shrapnel from Pont Rouge to Quesnoy. An aeroplane arrived later and ranged the guns on cross-roads near Frelingheim. On this day General French passed by the battery and also visited the O.P. Good work was accomplished near Point 63 by "D" sub-section. At one time the situation on the left became grave owing to an unexpected advance by the enemy, and "D" sub switched round and fired through a gap in the hedge. An R.H.A. battery had withdrawn two hundred yards to our rear, but in the excitement and heat of action men simply obeyed orders without a knowledge of the exact state of affairs prevailing at the time. Our cavalry reinforcements appeared on the left, and the danger passed without further mishap. Sergeant Hooper was then engaged with "C" sub, who were concerned with counter-battery work within their normal switch. He affirms that Sergeant J. Gaughran was laying for "D" sub, performing fine work under difficult conditions.

*20th October.* Counter-battery work on aeroplane-registered shoot of yesterday pending the arrival of another 'plane. The enemy had crossed the River Douve and a destructive shoot was commenced on the bridge at Pont Rouge by the right section, the left section shelling Warneton to impede the enemy's advance. The number of guns firing at the bridge made observation difficult, but at any rate it was demolished, and cavalry pressed forward to take advantage of this success.

## WITH THE HEAVIES

*21st October.* Men had hardly got to sleep when the call came for another line of march. At 3 a.m. the battery was on the move, and by 9 o'clock was firing on Warneton from east of Neuve Eglise. This town had been reached at 5 a.m., officers and men sleeping on the pavements. At Le Bizet billets were found in the police station, the men expressing themselves as feeling "quite at home." Action was opened in the tobacco field. It was in this town that men first heard from the mysterious interior of an automatic piano the famous strains which accompany the words "Après la guerre fini." Flash screens were erected in front of the guns with leaves from the field, and Major Brake assisted with axe in felling a tree that had caused a premature. Only for one hour was this fire maintained when orders came to proceed south again to Le Bizet, and reaching the north end of the village, enfilading fire was opened down the River Lys, the right bank being searched. Thus a full and busy day for the battery on this memorable date, the commencement of the first battle of Ypres. Counter-battery work was continued, sometimes by communication with O.P.'s, at other times by aerial observation.

*24th October.* On the 24th at 11 a.m. the right section marched to Fleurbaix to rejoin the 6th Division, and came into action at L'Armée, a small village south-east of Armentières. The left section continued searching the banks of the Lys as far as Warneton.

*25th October.* The right section, now ready for serious work, were ranged by aeroplane on hostile battery and then fired by compass till dark on a battery in position near La Touquet. The left section, previously at Le Bizet, and now near a farm three hundred yards south-east of Rabèques cross-roads, were also on counter-battery work, but at 10.30 a.m. came under heavy and accurate enemy fire. A limber wagon of ammunition exploded in the road and one gun was also damaged, with the loss of what little kit the sub-section

## WITH THE HEAVIES

possessed. General Milne, G.O.C., R.A., who happened to be passing at the time, consoled the men with the promise of more kit in the near future, and he optimistically assured them that "this was nothing to what they would have to go through." Fortified with this bright prospect, the men cleared from the immediate vicinity till the shelling had ceased. The guns were removed at dusk. It is necessary that the reader shall retrace his steps for a few days in order that an additional account of the 21st may be included. On the 21st, the battery being in action at Neuve Eglise, the wagon-lines took up position at Le Bizet. About 7 o'clock in the evening the enemy commenced a sudden attack on the battery front. Very little artillery fire could be heard, and the attack consisted mostly of machine-gun and rifle fire, with a liberal display of Verey lights. An order came from the battery for gun and wagon teams. Their work finished, the drivers had returned to their billets, a distance of some five hundred yards. They were at once alarmed and came out at the double. All hands assisted in harnessing up, and the gun limbers were sent on first, the remaining wagons being packed in readiness to join the guns as they came along. The whole move was done in about twenty minutes. The battery went back and billeted for the night, going into action at dawn in an orchard.

At the battery position the gunners had settled down in the police station, and meeting the first beds they had "struck" in the country, men were "turning in" in anticipation of a good night's rest, when the order came to "pack up" soon after the commencement of the attack. About twelve men were detailed out on patrol duty in front in case of a break-through. On arrival of the teams guns were moved and the patrols called in.

*26th October.* Taking up the story from the time of the "General Milne incident," fire was opened on Fort D'Englos, flank observation being directed by O.C.

## WITH THE HEAVIES

24th Battery R.F.A. Good results from this shoot somewhat compensated for the narrow escapes of yesterday. The exact date is not certain, but it was about this time that the incident connected with "Wagstaff" Farm took place. In the short space of two minutes ten chickens were reported as casualties! The left section now brought their two guns along, and the whole battery moved to near Fleurbaix. To have four guns together meant less work and communication, no small advantage in these difficult times. Owing to spies, a guard had to be maintained on the lines of communication between the two sections.

27th October. Fire was again directed on Fort D'Englos and subsequently on hostile batteries by aeroplane observation. In both cases good results were obtained, one round of the latter shoot bursting in a gun emplacement. Work continued on hostile parties and also a movement of machine-guns massing behind the factory south-east of La Hossoie. Several direct hits were obtained, our fire being very effective. Fort D'Englos was again shelled in the evening.

28th-29th October. A good deal of counter-battery work was directed by aerial observation, and the improvement in this particular branch led to good results. Direct hits reported on batteries and buildings served to cheer and encourage the men in their hard work. Sometimes fire was controlled by an officer at the forward O.P., and on these days of the 28th and 29th fine work was accomplished by all guns, hostile batteries that had been causing considerable interference being silenced by good shooting.

30th October. Perenchies, Enneneres, Châ d'Hancarderie, Radinghe, and Aubers. In all these places were hidden German batteries, superior in size to our own. Yet by perseverance and dogged pluck they were successfully engaged by a far less number of guns with smaller calibre and at times when economy in ammunition was essential. The left section shelled a battery at

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Aubers, and at the request of the Cameronians, houses at Bas Maisnil, where enemy infantry were assembling.

*31st October.* Fired on batteries previously located and registered, also on factory near La Hossoie, reported to be used as an observation post. The left section scored two hits on guns at Bois Iolance, fire being directed from the air.

Mention is also made of a visit by General Rawlinson whilst the battery was at Fleurbaix. It was near the end of the month, but the exact day is not certain.

*1st November.* A march was now ordered on Nieppe, the guns crossing the Lys at Erquinghem. A halt was made at L'Épinette for the midday meal, and at 6 o'clock in the evening billets chosen at Hallobeau.

*2nd November.* Cooks were up while it was yet dark to prepare an early breakfast, and we were on the move again by 5 a.m. Sections then parted, the right section choosing their old position at L'Armée and the left section occupying ground at Le Bizet. The right section pulled in and prepared for an aeroplane shoot on an active German battery north of the cross-roads near Mont-de-Premesques. At 1 p.m. interference was experienced from bursts of shrapnel fired from the direction of a château near the target. Most rounds fell fifty or a hundred yards short, and detachments were temporarily withdrawn from the guns. Fire was resumed on the 'plane target at 3.40 p.m. and with good effect, several shells being reported as bursting on target. At dusk a fresh position was chosen and the battery withdrawn. Meanwhile the left section again moved and came into action on the right of 31st H.B. just outside Le Bizet, and were engaged in sweeping hostile batteries at Warneton.

*3rd November.* Right section now in their fresh position east of Rue de Lettres, and were busily occupied in shelling a church steeple at Wez Macquart, used as an observation post. The target was hit, though not demolished. At this time a serious shortage of shells

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was experienced, and lorries travelled long distances in the search for 60-pounder ammunition. Rounds of 50-pounder lyddite fired with composite cartridge did not explode, and the battery temporarily ceased firing. In days when the infantry needed the maximum support from the artillery a destructive shoot was limited to thirty rounds. Regarding the "50-pounder shell, charge 6 pound 12 ounces," the opinion of the men on the guns was that the cordite never fully burnt, and blow-backs on opening the breech were common. A number of men had their hair singed in this manner. The shells were also inaccurate for ranging purposes.

*4th November.* A typical November day, fog, rain, and mist. Work from forward O.P. or from the air was impossible, and no rounds were fired by the right section. Generally speaking, weather had been good till now, and with a superiority in numbers of men and guns, the advantage rested with the enemy in this mobile warfare. Left section moved a short distance and continued with counter-battery work.

*5th November.* A better day for work. Wez Macquart steeple again the object of attention. Had any German been observing from this target, he must have had an exciting time, for several hits were obtained. Both sections were also busy shelling hostile batteries near Perenchies and Ferme-de-la-Croix.

*6th November.* Like the 4th, a dismal day of mist, with observation impossible. It needed all the powers of invention to find such occupations as would while away the long hours. "Nap" and "pontoon" passed away many dud afternoons and not a little money. Some men spent a deal of spare time in the less exciting pursuit of letter-writing, and in divers ways the irksomeness of active service during periods of indifferent weather was avoided.

*8th November.* Marched to La Toulette, near Fleurbaix, to engage guns in Radinghem-Aubers area. Left section actively engaged in counter-battery work.

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*9th November.* Left section shelled German battery near Ferme-de-la-Croix and supported French attack on the Messines-Warneton Road.

*10th November.* Arrived at La Toulette. The right section took up their special work on hostile guns and shelled batteries reported to be at Berniere Farm. Left section shelled the Messines-Warneton Road. The work of both sections was repeated on the 11th.

*12th November.* Church towers at Fromelles and Beauchamps both afforded good observation for the enemy in his trench registration and counter-battery work, and these points were therefore shelled. Several hits were recorded, though targets were not completely demolished. Two batteries near Berniere Farm and north of Beauchamps were engaged and silenced.

*13th-14th November.* Continued in destructive shoot on O.P.'s held by the enemy and succeeded in partially demolishing the church tower at Fromelles. Both sections were busy with counter-battery work. During such periods as permitted the horse-lines to be stationary for any length of time, there was always an accumulation of work to be faced. All horses had been worked very hard and not a few showed traces of fatigue. As the result of so many forced marches breast-galls and sore places were very common, and all attention was needed to keep these important members of the battery in good working order.

*15th November.* Left section returned from near Le Bizet at 4 a.m. and took up position formerly occupied by the right section at L'Armée.

*16th November.* A hostile field gun brought up near the trenches and which was searching our lines, engaged and silenced. Infantry reported as entrenching at Englos also shelled. Emplacements near Bois Blancs shelled as the result of report from our aircraft. The good effect of fire was verified by the "Bufs," then in the line, bursts in the emplacements being observed.

*18th November.* Shelled enemy's trenches in front of



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the 16th Infantry Brigade. Later in the afternoon aircraft reported motor transport to the number of forty or fifty and three battalions of infantry on road east of Fort D'Englos. These targets were immediately engaged. On the next day usual work was commenced, but a heavy fall of snow at 11 a.m. prevented further observation.

*20th November.* A large farm three hundred yards west of Le Quesne and suspected as being used by the enemy was effectively shelled, rounds bursting within the building. Here in the log books occur the first mention of the co-ordinate system in map-reading. The previous method of marking places by the distances near different letters contained in the neighbouring towns or villages had often been rather vague.

*21st November.* At the request of G.O.C. 16th Infantry Brigade, we shelled farm buildings at Bois Blancs. Snipers were hidden within these buildings and had caused considerable annoyance to our trenches. Fire was effective, rounds bursting in the building.

*22nd November.* Two hostile batteries shelled with good effect, and fire also directed on trains at Perenchies Station.

*23rd-24th November.* Enemy snipers again gave trouble and groups of haystacks south-west of Bois Blancs were shelled together with a house on the cross-roads at Bridoux. Shelled farm at Bridoux at request of G.O.C. 7th Division. This was again shelled on the 30th. Eight direct hits were reported by the forward O.P. of 108th H.B., R.G.A.

*1st December.* Fired at battery at Le Maisnil and hits on the gun-pits were reported by the O.P. Farm buildings near Fort D'Englos were also hit.

This month saw the first leaves to England granted, and men became pardonably excited at the prospect of once more seeing the old country. The railhead was then at Steenwerck. Curiously the first man to obtain leave came back under armed escort. Having found his

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way from Steenwerck to Pont Nieppe on the return journey, and not being quite sure of the exact location of the wagon-lines, he inquired of a sentry. The sentry had never heard of a heavy battery, and Gunner Warren was detained during the night for further inquiries. The matter was put right in the morning, when Gunner Warren appeared with his escort. All men having seen the same amount of active service, the order of going was drawn from a hat. The period of leave only made it possible to enjoy at the most three clear days at home.

*2nd December.* Counter-battery work by both sections. At Hallobreau one officer and twenty-five men represented the battery at an inspection of the 6th Division by His Majesty the King.

*3rd-4th December.* Usual work continued. December proved a dismal and wet month, with plenty of mist and fog. Every day mobile warfare became more impossible for the Germans, and after the battles of the Aisne and Ypres trench warfare began and was maintained during December, no big battles being fought on either side. Only one move was made by the battery, the right section changing position on the 14th of this month. Thus gunners and drivers had chance to settle down and make their "homes" as comfortable as circumstances permitted, and gun-pits were improved and communications bettered.

*5th December.* Several direct hits were obtained on houses at Escobecques by the right section, the left section firing at farm and road near Englos.

*6th-12th December.* Hardly any firing. We shelled Perenchies Station on the 8th and 9th.

*13th December.* Registered on Perenchies Station following report of train there.

*14th December.* After their comparatively long stay in one position the right section now moved from La Toulette to a position a hundred yards south of Le Chapelle Rompue, near Le Bizet. An aeroplane arrived

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next day to range the right section, but owing to the prevailing mist the shoot had to be postponed.

*16th December.* A better day enabled La Toulette cross-roads to be registered by aeroplane, and counter-battery work was carried on by both sections. On every occasion when weather permitted, the O.P. were always busy up forward on the look-out for likely targets. Out for a long stretch, meals were generally carried in the form of iron rations, two signallers usually accompanying the officer on duty. Despite hostile shelling, communications throughout were maintained in an efficient manner.

*19th-21st December.* Usual work, with no special incidents. Not engaged on the 22nd and 23rd.

*24th December.* Again shelled Wez Macquart church tower. Four hits on the base of the tower were recorded.

*25th December.* Not engaged. Neither section fired on this first Christmas Day spent in France. The left section at Erquinhem played a football match, and as far as the circumstances allowed men kept up the cheer of Christmas in a real British manner. Many of the right section marched off to their favourite estaminet at Le Bizet, and the automatic piano, with the same old tune, was in great demand. Boiled pork, potatoes, parsnips, and Christmas "duff" from the *Daily Mail* Fund made a fine variation from the monotonous bully. Thus, though far from home, the atmosphere of this festive season was maintained. The day was very quiet, hardly a shot being fired, and infantry returning from the trenches brought back cigars and souvenirs, evidence that the stringent rules of warfare had been slightly relaxed on this festal occasion. Each man received a Christmas card and a gift of pipe, tobacco, and cigarettes, together with a photograph of H.R.H. Princess Mary. Other gifts came from Hodder & Stoughton, Limited, from Mrs. Burdett Smith (Annie Swan, the novelist), and from Sir William Robertson Nicholl. About this time the men had the first opportunity of witnessing

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performances by the "Follies" Concert Party of the 6th Division near Erquinhem, and the right section were able to visit the 4th Division Cinema Palace at Nieppe. These entertainments proved very popular and provided recreation of mind at a time when it was badly needed.

*26th-27th December.* Shelled hostile batteries. After the rest of yesterday both sides now seemed to be doing their best to show that a war was still in progress. On the 29th a slight haze prevented good observation, but Quesnoy Station was again shelled, the first round being reported as a direct hit. The last day of the year was typical of the month. It rained!

*December.* A nightly feature round about the month of December was the enormous number of searchlights used by the Germans. They were directed on to the trenches and were probably used instead of Verey lights. On quiet nights, notwithstanding the absence of artillery fire or any special raid or attack, there was usually plenty of rifle-fire. This was the time when both sides were beginning to settle down to definite trench positions. Later in the war such a practice tended to disappear, and rifles were comparatively little used.

Constant mention is made of 24th Battery, R.F.A., in the records, and there was a very good feeling between the Heavy Battery and its namesake. Major Arbuthnot, D.S.O., O.C. of the 24th Battery, R.F.A., had a craze for counter-battery work which the limited range of his 18-pounders failed to satiate, and our own battery answered frequent requests generally to Major Arbuthnot's entire satisfaction. A special line was run out from his O.P. to our battery, and it was often used.

Details of incident—date uncertain. (Major Miles or Captain Walker would probably remember or have notes of this occasion.)

Position: Left section at L'Armée—the final position under the two pear trees.

An experimental aeroplane shoot was carried out from this position. It was worked by lamps both from 'plane



MAJOR E. MILES, M.C.



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and ground, and a number of Staff and Royal Flying Corps officers had come to judge the success of the experiment. The chosen target was a farm which was visible from the guns and which therefore afforded good scope for criticism of observations by the aeroplane. Range and line were found and the farm hit and set on fire after some fifteen rounds, the aeroplane observer sending "Cease firing; target ablaze." There were plenty of "brass-hats" present. One man working the lamps (name unmentioned) recalls that he heard a Flying officer remark to his fellow-pilot, apropos the Staff officers, "What a bag old Fritz would have if he caught this little lot!"

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1915

*1st January.* Right section at Le Bizet, Belgium.

Left section at Rue des Acquets, near L'Armée, France.

*2nd January.* Shelled La Grande Court, reported to be used as a store. Fire was effective, the building being repeatedly hit. Working parties and wagons were also dispersed south of Fort D'Englos.

*3rd-4th-5th January.* Weather poor, little work done. In this month men enjoyed the first chance of obtaining a really good bath.

*6th January.* Opened fire on cross-roads and bridges in Quesnoy, fire being effective, and the following day shelled enemy trenches west of Wez Macquart.

*8th-13th January.* Usual work continued each day with no special incident to vary the monotony. Batteries, cross-roads, bridges, working parties and observation posts were all shelled.

*14th January.* Registered on Frelingheim Brewery. Shelled and practically demolished the brewery and adjacent buildings. There were twenty-six direct hits and only the fragments of the rear walls were left standing. This bombardment was carried out simultaneously by a 6" howitzer battery of the 4th Division and 2nd Brigade R.F.A. 6th Division, to destroy buildings from which our trenches were enfiladed by the enemy snipers. Left section registered enemy howitzer batteries near Le Touquet. The next five or six days we were mostly engaged on counter-battery work. A column of motor transport on the move in Perenchies was shelled, and on the 22nd the village of L'Aventure was registered. It was believed to contain a German headquarters. Haze prevented accurate observation, but one house appeared to be set on fire. We were not engaged on the 23rd and 24th on account of the haze and mist.



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*25th-31st January.* Firing on batteries and other points of enemy activity. Grandcourt Farm was shelled, four direct hits being obtained on the building, and infantry on the Lille-Perenchies road came under our fire. January was hardly an ideal month for artillery work. Sometimes it rained for the whole of the day, and altogether it was a wet month of a wet winter.

*1st February.* Frelingheim Brewery was again the object of attention, and the destruction of this nest of enemy snipers was completed. The trenches and wire entanglements in front were also shelled, a large portion of the latter being blown away, and one shell bursting right in the trench. Fire was then turned on to the water tower which was used as a machine-gun post. Four hits were obtained, two at the base, one about eight feet up and one through the cistern at the top. The Queen's Westminsters were in the line at the time, and shortly afterwards there appeared in the London *Evening News* a column under the heading "Westminsters' Report of Great Shoot." Such success was very encouraging, and a message of congratulation from the G.O.C., R.A., 6th Division, followed.

*2nd February.* Bad weather prevented any observation.

*3rd February.* Fire was opened on a hostile battery which was shelling Houplines. Five out of six rounds burst in the village of L'Aventure from where the battery was reported, and after the third round fire on Houplines ceased. It is probable that the hostile shoot was observed from houses in L'Aventure. "D" sub-gun had moved forward on the night of the 2nd for the purpose of registering La Hossoie factory. This was completed, and twelve direct hits recorded. "C" sub-gun continued with counter-battery work by aeroplane observation.

*4th-5th February.* Good shooting accomplished on both these days. A house occupied by the Huns was shelled. The roof of a château was hit three times, and

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parts of a wood in the vicinity set on fire. The 6th and 7th were dud days, and we did no firing.

*8th February.* Barges on Deule at Quesnoy Bridge were shelled and fire reported by air observation. By the same co-operation a heavy gun and two howitzers at Senarmont were engaged, and as the result of this shoot we kept up harassing fire during the afternoon. Hostile battery at Premesques was also shelled and disengaged at the request of O.C. 24th Battery R.F.A., who were being shelled from this source.

*9th-13th February.* Three of these days were too dud for work, but on the 10th two houses used by snipers at Wez Macquart were destroyed. Snipers were also active in other houses and three more were destroyed on the 13th, being totally wrecked and rendered untenable. Portions of the brickwork in the cemetery were also destroyed.

*14th February.* Howitzers and transport having been seen to enter La Grandcourt Farm, this was shelled, and the transport was observed to leave hurriedly.

*15th February.* Not engaged. Bad weather—snow and sleet.

*16th-21st February.* Usual counter-battery programme carried out, together with the destruction of other machine-gun posts in houses near Wez Macquart. February provided some variations in weather, snow, rain mist and dense fog all interfering with observation at different intervals.

*23rd February.* The destruction of houses at Frelingheim was ordered. They were fortified, loopholed, contained machine-guns and commanded the lift of trenches north of Houplines held by the Queen's Westminster. The houses would also sweep the ground over which an infantry attack must cross. A château to the north was entirely destroyed, the roof being stripped and several shells bursting within the building. A white house in the centre was also destroyed and the row of houses to the south came off pretty badly, several

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fronts being blown in, and the wire in front was damaged.

*24th February.* Not engaged—fog.

*25th February.* Weather still uncertain, snow and haze interfering. However, a field battery north-west of La Houlette was engaged and five or six direct hits recorded. On the 28th we shelled a chimney at Frelingheim Brewery used as a snipers' post and for observation. The eighth round hit the foot of the chimney and the ninth brought it down level with the ground. The left section were busy with counter-battery work, scoring a direct hit on battery emplacement near La Vallée and setting on fire a barn close by.

*1st March.* Left section shelled motor transport at Wez Macquart cross roads, and in retaliation for enemy's fire on Armentières shelled Premesques. One round ignited some highly inflammable substance, which burnt with considerable smoke and flame for a long time.

*2nd March.* Shelled battery near Château de Flandres. Two direct hits on No. 1 gun, one on parapet and one on emplacement, and three hits—one of which caused an explosion—on No. 2 gun, was the result. Fire was then switched on to a single gun concealed in shed beside a farm. Four hits demolished the shed, two hits were obtained on the farm and five rounds fell within the farm buildings. Twelve men were seen to leave the farm after the first round and as stretchers were seen to be brought up later, fire evidently caused casualties amongst the gun-section. The G.O.C. 6th Division telephoned his congratulations on the excellent shooting of our left section.

*3rd March.* The tower of Wez Macquart Brewery was shelled. Four hits on the tower itself were recorded and five in the building. Another building in rear was set on fire and shelling was then directed into the wagon-house.

*4th March.* Not engaged—stormy and dull.

*5th March.* Snipers again giving trouble from

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Frelingheim Brewery, and "Snipers' Rest," a number of direct hits were obtained on these two targets. Shelled "Chicken Run"; O.C. 43rd Brigade telephoned that it was almost completely destroyed. The G.O.C. 18th Infantry Brigade sent his congratulations.

*6th-7th March.* Not engaged—stormy.

*8th March.* From this date till the end of the month, records show that the battery was constantly busy engaging a variety of targets. The weather kept fairly fine for observation, only one or two other days in addition to those previously mentioned proving too dud for work. Requests were often sent through from infantry brigades and field batteries, and were always answered with alacrity. Batteries, redoubts, trenches, observation posts, working parties and buildings were all shelled, and in the majority of cases with success. Considerable confusion was caused amongst transport at Quesnoy-Deulemont on the 9th, and after "Snipers' Rest" had been shelled, O.C. 72nd Battery R.F.A. reported it "no longer fit to live in." After an absence of a month, a train appearing in Quesnoy Station received a very warm reception and quickly left, going south. The two sections switched lyddite and shrapnel behind the German lines so that from Warneton down to Château de Flandres there is hardly a place but appears in records as having been shelled. Shelling a working party at La Citadelle, the last round caused a terrific explosion, the flames reaching a height of 200 feet. Minor explosions followed and the place was still smoking at dusk. On the 22nd about thirty 5·9" howitzer shells fell in the vicinity of the right section, but happily no damage was done. On the same day the left section ranged on an anti-aircraft gun by aeroplane observation, and with such success that the R.F.C. subsequently sent the following message from Squadron:—

"Bravo! Another archie less! We'll see you through!"

Yet another direct hit on an anti-aircraft battery was

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obtained by the right section. The 20th saw another great shoot, the battery obtaining twenty-three hits out of twenty-six rounds at Wez Macquart Church, which was a nest of machine-gunners and snipers and also a valuable observation post to the enemy. The 25th round saw the tower tottering. Major Miles 'phoned that "the wind would do the rest," but as one gun was loaded, the 26th round was fired, and the whole construction collapsed. Hardly a shoot is recorded without mention of direct hits or some other satisfactory result, a tribute to good work both at the guns and O.P. The amount of ammunition expended by the battery since its arrival in France till the end of March, 1915, was 5,210 rounds. That so little hostile fire was experienced speaks only too well of the excellent leadership and skilfully-chosen positions. No one day particular for any very remarkable incident could be picked from the first three months of 1915. It is just a simple record of patience and perseverance, of persistence and dogged pluck, qualities which had checked the great German rush in the first mobile warfare of 1914, and which still displayed themselves now that the more permanent trench positions were being maintained.

Some time during March—the exact date does not appear to be mentioned—Major H. E. J. Brake left the battery for a post of higher responsibility, and as the commander of the battery during six months of hard and incessant fighting, his name will be honoured and respected by all. Major Brake spoke a few words of farewell to the right section, stating with what pleasure and pride he had commanded the battery and thanking the men for their response. He again emphasised the necessity of treating the enemy as they deserved. In Major Brake we lost the commander who gave the battery its first inkling of discipline and work in the difficulties of the early months.

*1st April.* Right section at Le Bizet. Left section at L'Armée. Ammunition expended, 5,210 rounds.

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Ranging was attempted with aeroplane at hostile battery near Capinghem. Interference was experienced from another German battery, which fired round for round, bursting shrapnel right over the guns. From fuzes and bearings of shell-holes, this battery appeared to be a 4.2" near Paradis. The second day of April was too misty for work. On the 3rd the right section fired at a working party in front of La Citadelle. The left section were on counter-battery work. One gun engaged a battery near La Blue and the other gun turned on to hostile howitzers, obliged them to cease fire and caused an explosion.

*4th-5th-6th April.* Unfortunately the promise of good weather shown on a gloriously fine 1st of April did not hold out, and from the 3rd till the 9th of the month wind, rain and squalls were experienced. On the 5th fire was opened at the billets and O.P. of the Fleur D'Ecosse battery. The observer reported seven hits in the grounds, considerable damage being done. From 1 p.m. at long intervals six small shrapnel shells, calibre about 2½", burst in front of the guns. Fuzes picked up were set at 64 and 42. The 7th and 8th were also dud days.

*9th April.* Fired lyddite at Frelingheim Brewery and adjacent houses between 8.30 and 9.18 a.m. to cover attack on Le Touquet. The remaining part of the northern wall of the brewery was destroyed on the 11th when the battery once again came under the 4th Division.

*13th-17th April.* Usual work was carried on till the evening of the 17th, when both sections joined up at Erquinghem and marched after dark to a new position near Fosse. The period of action at Le Bizet and L'Armée had been the longest for any single position, and though looking forward to a change, men left the old scenes and faces with genuine regret. They had made friends with the people and children of the two villages. Long afterwards, men would recall the old estaminet which held the old piano with the same old favourite tune.

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At Erquinghem just before the line of march was started, 12th Siege Battery were parking in the town. This was the first 9·2" howitzer seen by the men in France. On the way 114th H.B. was passed coming to take over our old position. So in the dark, and with feelings such as have been described, the battery pulled to Fosse near Neuve Chapelle, scene of the British victory on March 10th. The pull-in was a rather difficult one, but the guns were in action as dawn was breaking. The first impression of the new position was none too inspiring, for there were very few signs of habitation and only one farm-house near.

*18th April.* It was evident that for some little time at least the old comforts of Le Bizet and L'Armée would be missed. On the right was a big redoubt which sheltered a 6" gun. The site had been taken over from 114th Heavy Battery. The gun-pits already dug, were improved and strengthened, and the rest of the day was spent in fixing telephone communication and improving the battery position. Nothing of great importance seems to have happened during the remaining days of the month. There was a fair number of shoots with aeroplane co-operation on cross-roads and batteries, and from this date two wireless operators stayed and lived with the battery. Previously wireless sets had been brought from the squadron only when the occasion demanded. Even after wireless installations had been allotted to batteries, rocket shoots with aircraft were used, and two were carried out at the Fosse position. A look-out with field-glasses sang out the signals as he watched the aeroplane, different combinations of colours denoting different observations. Such shoots were always interesting, and a succession of "red—green—red," at that time the signal for an O.K., was hailed with delight.

The guns were under enormous trees and a rope-ladder was fixed to the top of one of these for the purposes of spotting and for judging the heights of shrapnel bursts. The forward observation post was at Min Barn near

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Rouge Croix. Directly on the right as one faced the line and about 200 yards distant was the blood-red crucifix itself, standing alone as though immune from the drab chaos of war. The rest of the the village was in total ruins. The O.P. was a large barn filled with hay. Platforms and a sand-bagged look-out were erected by Corporal Wheeler Lucas, more affectionately dubbed "Spokey." Another interesting and essential feature of this O.P. was a canvas sheet which stretched to the entrance of a dug-out on the ground from the ridge pole at the top of the barn. This dug-out was constructed at the rear side of the barn, and when the latter was strafed the observer could slide down the canvas sheet to comparative safety. The exciting moments of "slipping the slip" were hardly times when one stood on ceremony, and colonels and majors often came down with linesmen and telephonists. There was a certain German 77 mm. battery which used to fire salvoes on this barn, and which invariably succeeded in hitting some part of it. Another impression gathered from Sergeant Hooper, who retains very vivid recollections of the "slipping" process, was the enormous number of telephone lines which ran to this observation post. After these periodical attentions from Fritz one would see a whole bunch of linesmen sorting wires, an operation very trying to the tempers of all concerned.

General Sir James Wilcox, commanding the Lahore Division, came round with his staff and inspected the battery soon after its arrival at Fosse. Also in April special leaves to England were granted on account of good work by the battery.

*1st May.* At 4.50 a.m. the enemy started a heavy bombardment of the Rue du Bois and Pont Logy, and all batteries were called to fire on their night-lines, later known as S.O.S. lines. At, and previous to this time, whole detachments would turn out for shoots and not half detachments as were worked later in the war. The battery had not become used to sustained bombard-



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ments ; they were accustomed to firing 40 or 50 rounds and then resting till the next effort. The front of Bois du Biez was searched and swept with shrapnel, and later in the morning hostile batteries were ranged on by aeroplanes. A howitzer field battery firing at the barn O.P. was engaged on its flashes being observed, and was immediately silenced. On the 2nd of May we continued counter-battery work in conjunction with 48th Heavy Battery.

*3rd-7th May.* Nothing of special mention beyond retaliation against hostile batteries firing on Min Barn, trenches and Neuve Chapelle.

*8th May.* On the night of May 8th a conference of sergeants was called by Major Miles, and it was explained that an important attack was to take place on the morrow. Perhaps, because this was the first such conference attended, undue importance was probably attached to the proceedings, and there was great expectancy on the part of the men. Kits were packed on the wagons ready for the "advance" to a forward position.

*9th May.* The battery commenced firing at 5 a.m. acting as a counter-battery in the attack in front of Neuve Chapelle, and this fire was kept up continuously throughout the day. Good work was accomplished, several batteries being effectively silenced. We had been apprehensive of a severe strafing, but only one man, Gunner Carter, was wounded in going up to prepare the forward position.

"C" sub's spring blew out, but another was obtained from the 1st Canadian Heavy Battery, and the good work carried on. This was the biggest shoot in which the battery had taken part up to date, and was their first experience of a really sustained bombardment. At 7 o'clock in the evening firing ceased, but a few rounds were fired at 11 p.m. at hostile howitzers shelling the trenches. Ammunition fired on this day: Lyddite, 408; shrapnel, 260; total, 668 rounds. In this position 48th Heavy Battery were met for the first time since

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the two batteries had been together at Woolwich. The 108th Heavies—old friends of the Aisne—were also in position just in front. A 15" howitzer was seen for the first time near Fosse.

*10th May.* "Registered four batteries by aeroplane and during the day engaged various batteries with good effect. Ammunition expended: Lyddite, 43; shrapnel, 56."

These are the few remarks under May 10th. Such terse statements occur with consistent regularity, with such regularity that one would almost miss the significance of the fact that such good work was done with so few rounds. Targets were generally registered, whether by aeroplane or forward observation, in a surprisingly short time.

*11th May.* Two batteries—flashes seen from Min Barn—effectively shelled, and some new earthworks also shelled. At 11 p.m. orders were received to move at once to Abeele.

*12th May.* Guns limbered up, the battery left the Fosse position and arrived at Abeele, where the guns were parked till 6.30 p.m. Progress of march was through Estaires, Steenwerck, Bailleul, to Abeele. A move was then made at 6.30 p.m. to one mile south-west of Poperinghe, and we bivouacked for the night in a field off the road and near a big dressing station. Just two words—"Wet night"—which are recorded in the diary will suffice to explain what degree of comfort was experienced on this particular night, for there were no billets or shelters of any description, and everybody was glad to see dawn of the 13th, even though it was still raining.

*13th May.* At 7 o'clock in the evening the gunners moved to a position south-west of Ypres just off the Vlamertinghe Road and near to the convent or asylum, all the four gun-pits being together. Wet as had been the previous day, this was still worse, and a more uninspiring introduction to the "city of the dead" could hardly be imagined. Even in other positions the fame of

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this war-scarred area had reached the men, and as the dim outlines of the cathedral and Cloth Hall loomed in in the dusk, a certain amount of natural foreboding was experienced by most.

The following account of the first impressions of Ypres was gathered from Sergeant, then Bombardier, A. R. Hooper.

*13th May.* "On this day an advance party preceded the guns to prepare the position before they should arrive. Even in these early days the town to which we were marching had gained a reputation which gave vague but grim forebodings of evil. It was therefore a very solemn party which moved off along the cobbled road with its beech-lined borders. It rained pitilessly, and darkness found us still trudging forward, dodging the endless stream of horse-transport which, as soon as the dusk appeared sprang up apparently from nowhere. However, our attention was soon attracted and held, for as we neared our destination the avenue was illuminated with a red glow of light from the burning buildings of the town. In truth the scene spelt war !

"As we were taking a momentary rest, the dim form of a military policeman glided from out the shadows and in peremptory tones he warned whoever was in charge that this was 'Shrapnel Corner,' and that the place had earned its name. He advised us a speedy change of map position, and with these few but expressive words retired rapidly to his lair.

"At this moment the O.C. appeared and took command. He had been out all day selecting a position. Marching briskly away, we turned to the right and then passed through a field; meanwhile all ranks instinctively inspected the surrounding pasture for signs of recent shell-holes. Though numerous, these seemed to be old ones, so with rising spirits everybody buckled to with picks and shovels to prepare the gun-pits which were to run under a long row of trees.

"Immediately behind us was a house which appeared

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to be intact. Another building in good preservation showed up on the left close to No. 4 pit. Looking towards Ypres the view was partially interrupted by the trees which lined the road to Kruisstraat, but the outline of a large building could be seen. This we afterwards knew as the asylum or convent. The lurid flare also disclosed the stately Cloth Hall and cathedral, and smaller churches thrust up their spires like so many skeleton spectres amid the smoke.

“Late at night the guns arrived and were pulled into the pits. The men worked all night in the pouring rain, for it was essential to fix adequate camouflage, as German aircraft were always very active above the salient. The first rays of dawn disclosed the covered ‘funk-holes’ on which so much labour had been expended, as rapidly filling with water. Thus early we found an enemy quite as bad and uncomfortable as iron projectiles in the Ypres area—water! However, we made the welcome discovery that the neighbouring houses were occupied by civilians, and very soon, tired and rain-soaked gunners were drinking coffee and chatting to madame with considerable gusto.”

An old lady and a little girl of some twelve years lived in the house nearest the road, and two men occupied the other house until May 24th, when the building was struck by a shell. The other people remained and sold coffee until June 22nd, when they moved to Vlamertinghe. The fortitude and resolution of the people in some of the houses was almost beyond belief, and the occupants of the buildings in Kruisstraat stayed till their tenements were but a mass of tumbled masonry and till the cellars alone were left for habitation. For their own safety they finally had to be ordered away. Thus did the spirit of Belgium shine out as a halo amid these dismal environs, the spirit of a country which replied to Germany on August 3rd, 1914, that “no strategical interest can justify the violation of right.”

The 13th of May also saw the introduction as a rein-

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forcement to the battery of "Fox," a dog which was found tied to a fence at one of the adjacent farms. Poor "Fox" was in a sorry plight, but attaching himself as a member of the cook-house, he soon "picked up." With his white shaggy coat and his qualities as a ratter, he remained a well-known figure wherever the battery made its abode.

*14th May.* The day was spent in making dug-outs and improving the position. For the first few nights the gunners slept in gardens, using biscuit tins, old boxes and ground-sheets for temporary bivvies. Fritz was also paying his usual attentions to Shrapnel Corner during the night and not a few "spares" would find their way into the garden. All ranks therefore decided that it would be more healthy to dig into the ground than to sleep on it. Unfortunately the weather continued wet and windy, and more trying conditions could hardly be imagined. The horselines moved forward to Vlamertynghe. At 10.30 p.m. orders were received to lay out line on a road. The 15th to the 19th was a tale of alternate rain and mist, but the 20th turned out rather better, and an aeroplane shoot was conducted in the afternoon on two batteries and a bridge across the Ypres-Commines Canal.

*21st May.* Promise of better weather spoiled again by mist and it was impossible to follow up yesterday's shoots with further aeroplane observation.

*22nd May.* Counter-battery work by order of the 11th Brigade. A 4.2" howitzer which was shelling Ypres was engaged and silenced. Better weather.

*23rd May.* The weather still holding fine, three batteries were registered by aeroplane observation. After this, cross-roads, a bridge, battery and house were successively registered, several direct hits being reported on these various targets. The total amount of ammunition expended during the day: Shrapnel, 25 rounds; lyddite, 6 rounds—gives some idea of the quality of the observation and gun-laying. Moreover, it must be borne in mind that corrections due to the direction and velocity of the wind had to be judged by a handkerchief, and it

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was not till the days of the Somme offensive, 1916, that wind and weather reports came through from meteorological experts.

A month before the Germans had advanced at Ypres by means of asphyxiating gas, and the battery were now issued with scarves. This was the first form of protection taken and the scarves were not treated with any chemical preparation but simply dipped in water and wrapped round mouth and nose, breathing being a matter of difficulty.

*24th May.* As if the higher authorities had anticipated the event, this supply could not have been more opportune and the morning of the 24th May, 1915, will live in the memory of all who were present with the battery. At 3 o'clock on this Whitsun Monday morning the alarm was given by B.S.M. Clark for every man to put on his scarf, and shortly after, the guns opened fire on "night-lines" against the attack of the Germans north of Ypres. Fire was directed on to a bridge which the enemy must cross in his attack, and before breakfast was announced, the gunners had earned this meal to the tune of 102 shells. The scarves did not lead to very complimentary remarks, and gun-laying, fuzing and loading were by no means easy in this new guise. The cloth had to be periodically dipped in more water.

Whilst dealing with gas, the second form of protection was cotton waste—treated with chemicals—in black gauze, and this proved more convenient for breathing. The third form was the "P" helmet, which was followed by the "P.H." Both were improved as time progressed, and lastly, in about September or October, 1916, came the "box respirator."

Soon after breakfast the effect of the cloud-gas in the trenches was seen, for hundreds of infantry came down the Vlamertynghes road reeling like so many drunken men. Ammunition wagons and lorries were filled with these unfortunate fellows, some slight cases and others obviously very severe. Some of those walking fell down







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exhausted and two men died by the cross-roads. There were not enough stretchers in Vlamertynghe to take the number of cases, and men were laid down along the pavements. Happily only minor effects were felt in the battery position itself, though buttons were tarnished and money in the pockets turned black. The civilians in the neighbouring houses fared rather badly, having no protection. In answer to subsequent inquiries, Esther and her sister, who lived at an adjacent farm and about whom more will be heard, explained that they had slept with the blankets covered over their heads.

The position came under fairly heavy shell-fire practically all through the day, and towards evening the men had their first experience of "Silent Jim," a shell of extraordinary high velocity. What must have been the same type of shell was heard in Vlamertynghe on May 13th as the battery arrived in the salient; at the time but little importance had been attached to the sound. The first shell landed six yards from the cook-house and the second into a small stream which ran across the field. Different men argued that they were bombs, mines, or prematures from neighbouring guns, but others falling in the vicinity, every man at least came to the same conclusion that he would feel safer at a greater distance.

A shell which could travel faster than sound, so that the explosion of the shell was heard before the report of the gun—such a happening was almost inconceivable and naturally caused a certain amount of consternation in the camp.

During the day the building nearest to the walnut tree received a direct hit from one of these lightning compliments. A large store of clothing in the upper compartment served to smother the burst, otherwise the civilians below must have been killed. They promptly cleared the next morning. Another projectile which made its introduction to the battery on this memorable day was the famous and terrible 17", fired probably from the

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Forêt D'Houthulst. They were generally aimed at targets of considerable magnitude, such as the convent or the town. These little Hun efforts came to be known as the "workman's train from Hotstuff Wood." The sound of their flight, as if some giant hand were tearing asunder the very sky, and the effect when a tremendous crescendo of vibrations burst into one mighty explosion, can hardly be described.

It were as well at this point to follow the fortunes of the forward observation party on this day. On the night of the 23rd Captain Mackintosh, accompanied by Bombardier Toone and Bombardier Hooper, proceeded to a post on Hill 40, which was reached about midnight. The point of vantage consisted of a small hut in a trench on the crest of a hill. It was a fine night, and hardly a sound was to be heard. On such occasions the silence of war was almost as impressive as the sound of war could be. Bombardier Hooper was sitting on the parapet watching for flashes from any hostile guns, when exactly at 3 a.m. three red rockets shot their course into the clear sky. At the same moment the enemy commenced their attack, and Captain Mackintosh immediately sent a message to Brigade:—

"Enemy attack commenced 3 a.m., preceded by three red rockets." Eighteen-pounders in rear were soon opening up with gun-fire, and other calibres quickly followed in retaliation to this enemy bombardment. The area round the observation post was heavily shelled, though there were no gas-shells, but at about 5 o'clock a big yellowish cloud was seen approaching. It was some twenty or thirty yards in height, "just like a thick London fog," and scarves were immediately soaked with the precious supply left in water-bottles. The gas came drifting down with the wind across the hill. An attempt was made to telephone through to Brigade, but the wires had been cut by fire, and Bombardier Toone went out to mend the break. Communication being re-established, the Brigade was informed about the gas

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just before the wire again broke. At 8.30 a.m. a dismounted cavalry unit appeared in extended order on the rear slope of Hill 40 and occupied the trench in which the observation post was established. The men laid down in the trench, their officers walking about on the top in front of the parapet telling the men to keep down and get under cover. The Germans opened up a heavy 5.9" howitzer concentration on this trench soon after and the unit suffered considerable losses. Subsequently they moved forward in the direction of Hooge, and finally disappeared in the dense cloud of gas and smoke.

The small party of observers were now concerned in successive endeavours to establish communication, but the wire was cut so often and in so many places that this operation was rendered well-nigh impossible. The Germans seemed to be following a definite and pre-arranged scheme of trench bombardment, heavily shelling different trenches in succession. When this hostile fire was switched to their own particular trench therefore. Captain Mackintosh and his two men retired *pro tem*, to a small bank about a hundred yards in rear and dug in as well as possible. They were forced to repeat this move several times. Finally Bombardier Hooper succeeded in reaching Lille Gate and getting through to O.P., but there were so many other wires running together at this point and the road was being so heavily shelled—amongst others a 17" shell dropped just the other side of the wall—that he was obliged to return to the O.P. via the Ypres-Menin railway, a route which was full of gassed men trying to get down the line, and praying for water. Bombardier Hooper returned later, and this time succeeded in putting the line through.

During the afternoon a wind had sprung up and the gas was less severe, but the shelling was still fairly heavy on Hill 40. As soon as the cloud gas had been discharged by the enemy, observation became hopeless, and it was impossible to see any movement of troops except those

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in the immediate vicinity. Nevertheless, useful information had been sent through to Brigade, notwithstanding the great difficulties of maintaining communication. The party suffered intense thirst due to the gas and smoke, and all their water supply had been used to wet the gas-scarves. In odd minutes they deepened the trench, Captain Mackintosh and the two telephonists taking their turns with pick and shovel. In the evening the shelling died away and the party returned to the battery. Gassed men were still being helped down the line, and the party also gave assistance in this direction. As one man aptly remarked to his chum on "turning in" this night, "Some Bank Holiday, Bill."

So with this day finished the phases known as the second battle of Ypres. These last hours of agony were the final desperate efforts of the enemy to force the evacuation of the salient. In the use of foul and sickening chlorine, they also marked the consummation of German treachery and ghastly frightfulness. This day alone would damn the fiendish inventors in the heart of every man who fought in the stifling atmosphere. Yet, despite heavy losses, the infantry and dismounted cavalry were proof against almost insurmountable difficulties. They met the waves of gas like heroes, and the waves of beings which followed this deadly emission found them still standing, though sadly shattered.

In the glorious record of this momentous day, the artillery lost none of its time-honoured traditions. Fighting was resumed in the old trench positions, and the enemy had lost—had lost irretrievably.

*25th May.* After the heavy day experienced yesterday, the 25th turned out wet and misty and too bad for observation, and though retaliation was opened on the 26th against a howitzer which was shelling trenches on Hill 60, the weather continued bad on the 27th and 28th and observation was again impossible. On the night of the 27th, whilst returning from the observation post, Captain Miles, Corporal F. Fenton and Gunner Preston

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met a party searching for dead amongst the trenches, and were promptly arrested on suspicion. Corporal Fenton and Gunner Preston were detained under charge of four stalwart "Jocks" during the time Captain Miles was being taken to the Ecole to satisfy the authorities of their good faith.

*29th May.* Batteries shelling Hill 60 were silenced, and at 11.30 a.m. battery at "O17 c 79" was registered and we afterwards fired for effect on this point, the shoot being conducted from the air. The map positions "O17 c" and "O17 d" became passwords in the battery. They represented two hostile batteries, an 8" howitzer and 5.9" howitzer respectively, and were nicknamed "Big and Little Willie." Our battery was evidently one of the items in the programmes of these units and they were a source of considerable annoyance and interference. If action was opened against either one of these positions, then so sure would the other battery open up in retaliation, and the ratio of shells which they would send back in answer was about ten to one.

*30th-31st May.* We fired on Menin Road as far as Veldhœk Farm. This road, running through "no man's land" was never free from shell-fire, and enjoying a superiority of position and observation, the Germans were able to drop shells at any yard along this "red road to Hooge." At night it was filled with crowds of transport, and these nights will ever live in the memory of artillery drivers who took their ammunition and stores along this dangerous route. The Kruisstraat road and the Vlamertyngherode road were also subject to heavy and accurate shelling, so that the neighbourhood of the battery was hardly a health resort. Nevertheless there were various estaminets, especially at the beginning, where the men would retire and talk about the day's happenings over a friendly glass. At this time the old pre-war prices still held good, and at the "Post Horn Café" a bottle of vin rouge could be obtained for the

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astonishingly low figure of 75 centimes. Unfortunately this retreat was subsequently destroyed by shell-fire. "Esther's" too, was a never-failing source of comfort and welcome.

*1st June.* Counter-battery work, including O17 d.

*2nd June.* Registered cross-roads at Oosttaverne by aeroplane. A few shells fell near to the horse-lines on this day. Horses were got away safely and the lines moved on the following day. The battery also fired by aeroplane on their old friends O17 d and O17 c, and altogether this was a heavy day's shooting. On the 3rd we registered a trench near Hooze obtaining a direct hit in it. A cutting, house and cross-roads were also registered and Sanctuary Wood shelled. The 4th was too misty for observation.

*5th June.* In the morning registered by aeroplane farm and house near Oosthoek. The bridge crossing the Ypres-Commines Canal near this same town was also fired on.

*6th June.* Not engaged. So many days "not engaged" was simply because the weather was either too wet or misty for observation. It signifies that no firing was done on these days, but there was always plenty of other work to be found. Gun-pits were improved and platforms strengthened, fresh camouflage added and repairs made good. Men could always use up spare time by increasing the few comforts in their billets, and many cosy little cribs were constructed in this endeavour to provide a "home from home." There was always the great enemy—water! So many tales have been written about lack of water and great thirst in wars, but in the Salient there was ever a plentiful supply. It had the knack of appearing in the wrong place, however, and many a gunner had his experience of "baling out." One simple remedy was to drain the supply into the next dug-out, but invariably this had disadvantages in the long run, for all these "old hands" had grasped the spirit of retaliation from their counter-battery work.

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So the men worked and joked, laughed and cursed, in this dull monotone of Ypres mud. Big wonder that men found fun out of life in the mechanical, monotonous routine; perhaps it was that it was essential to smile in order to keep the mind from other things. Company and conversation were very necessary factors, and impromptu meetings and "scratch" concerts would pass away the evenings for small groups in the different dug-outs.

There was letter-writing to be done also. And the mail! What heaps of comfort was not contained within the folds of that precious mail-bag—the one link between home and the battlefield, between the comforts of civilisation and the discomforts of mud and blood! Letters were gold-mines in Ypres. They were read, digested, and re-read and re-digested with an interest which would have flattered the senders could they but have seen. Had they also seen expectancy change to disappointment in a man's face when the priceless bundle was being sorted out, some would have written more often. Yes! Letters were gold-mines in the salient.

*7th June.* Shortly after midnight rapid fire was opened on a battery which was shelling our trenches. Counter-battery work continued on the 8th, but the 9th was wet and misty.

*10th June.* Battery not engaged. Gunner A. Honeyball was killed through an accident with a runaway horse at the wagon-lines.

The battery came under fairly heavy shell-fire, and Gunners Smith and Gibson, who had gone out on a rabbit-hunting expedition, found themselves casualties instead. Bullets from a chance shrapnel round caught both men, Gunner Smith receiving a rather severe wound in the leg and Gunner Gibson a slight wound in the arm. The doctor performed a speedy field operation to remove the bullet, and Gunner Smith was inclined to remonstrate until the doctor assured him what a

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trifle this was compared with other hair-raising operations he had transacted.

*11th June.* Fired at Stirling Château, more familiarly known as "Stirling Castle." The grounds were swept and considerable damage done.

*12th June.* Before dawn we shelled Hollebeke Château. At 12.30 p.m. we registered cross-roads at Klein Zillebeke and a road junction. In the afternoon a bridge over Basseville Beke in Herenthage Wood, and two batteries were fired on. Hollebeke Château was again shelled in the evening.

*13th June.* Registered by aeroplane trenches around Bellewaarde Lake, also shelled Herenthage Wood and later Hollebeke Château.

*14th-15th June.* Other trenches both sides of the lake were registered. Trenches were in existence all round the lake, and work on these two days was confined to a thorough registration by aeroplane of all these points.

*16th June.* At 3.20 a.m. on this day operations commenced with a view to capture trenches and straighten our line at Hooge. The right section began on a pre-arranged trench scheme, the left section being on counter-battery work. In addition, three other hostile batteries were reported active during the initial attack, all three being engaged. The first attack ended at 9.12 a.m.

The second attack commenced at 3.30 in the afternoon, the right section sweeping between the south-east corner of Bellewaarde Lake and two hundred yards north of the Menin Road. This scheme lasted until 5.55 p.m., the left section meanwhile engaging hostile batteries, including the old friend—dimensions 8"—O17 c. As usual, the battery position and neighbourhood came under periodical shell-fire during the day, but fortunately no casualties resulted. Fritz's shelling was generally pretty accurate, but there were so many points of interest near by and around the battery that one was not always



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quite sure as to what his programme really was. The wish being "parent to the thought," men would assure one another that fire could not possibly be meant for them, and that up to date the battery had not been "spotted." Yet the German aeroplanes were never idle in good weather, and it has been verified by several men that in the early morning they would come across the battery position so low that it would be necessary for their pilots to rise in order to avoid the tree-tops in the Post Horn Road which led to the battered village of Kruisstraat.

The 16th of June seems to mark the beginning of a series of struggles and bombardments for the possession of Hooze. Hooze itself, though the name will go down in history, consisted merely of a few scattered houses. Places like this, through constant struggles for possession, became infested with an importance far beyond their military significance. Both sides took this village, held it, then lost it for varying periods in the succeeding months. Both artilleries battered it beyond recognition so that trees, houses, and other landmarks entirely disappeared and Hooze became a mere map position. Many of the Old Contemptibles sleep their last watch near this red town. It was one of the worst points along the Ypres-Menin Road, and was situated in a small valley so that from Hill 40 one would look down into Hooze.

*17th June.* Not engaged. Day spent in repairing position. On the 18th we fired bursts of shrapnel along the Menin Road and engaged a battery which was shelling us. The 19th and 20th were dud days. The right section left for Caestre to obtain new guns. The 21st was also wet, but the pits of the right section were improved, and they now returned with two new guns.

*22nd June.* Registered by aeroplane three batteries, a bridge, and some trenches. At 7.30 p.m. a bombardment was opened on the trenches round Bellewaarde Lake. At 8 p.m. the infantry assault to capture trenches

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between Menin Road and Roulers Railway took place, and at that hour fire was lifted on to trench just west of Bellewaarde Lake and continued till 8.15 p.m. Aeroplane reported various hostile batteries active, and these were engaged.

Account by Lieut. S. T. Bennell, then Sergeant Bennell, of incidents connected with the morning of June 22nd, 1915.

"On the morning of June 22nd the right section were registering three batteries, a bridge, and some trenches by aeroplane observation. At that time no ammunition was kept in the battery position except rounds which could be placed in the firing battery wagons. During the registration the right section ran short of ammunition and it had been necessary to replenish from the wagons of the left section.

"At midday, therefore, wagons were sent from the lines with a fresh supply of ammunition, and my subsection turned out to reload their firing battery wagon. The detachment consisted of Sergeant S. T. Bennell, Corporal Day, Bombardier Mulley, Gunners Woolgar, T. West, G. Cook, G. King, S. Brooker, and Green.

"After the wagon was loaded and the camouflage replaced I gave the order to break off, but recalled Bombardier Mulley and Gunner Green to bury a heap of tins, etc., lying near, and stayed to see the job finished. The remainder of the detachment walked across the field.

"About two minutes after there was a loud explosion, and looking round, we saw that a high explosive shrapnel shell had hit the top of the tree. The detachment, being just beyond, caught the full blast of the burst. One man, Staff-Sergeant Plumb, was underneath the tree at the time, but fortunately escaped. For a minute or so nothing could be seen on account of the dust and smoke, and we thought that the men had got clear.

"Leaving the gun-pit, we made our way to the rear of the farm and found that Gunner G. Cook had been

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killed instantaneously and that Sergeant W. Cast and Gunners T. Woolgar, G. West, S. King, and W. McColgan had been wounded. Gunners T. Woolgar and G. West subsequently died in hospital from their wounds. Sergeant Cast, who was sitting in the sergeants' mess, received a shrapnel bullet through the leg, the only part of his person which happened to be exposed."

*23rd June.* Counter-battery work continued. We engaged and silenced two howitzer batteries who had been crumping our trenches. One of these was the evergreen O17 c. On the 24th and 25th we directed our attentions to Hollebeke Château.

*26th June.* We shelled batteries near Gheluvelt by aeroplane registration. This mode of co-operation was invariably successful, and wireless communication was used to a great extent by both sides. Of wireless operators serving with the battery in the salient mention can be made of Air Mechanic Shott, who fulfilled his task in a fine manner, though there were many difficulties to surmount. A sunken road in a wood east of Hooge was twice shelled during the day. At 5 p.m. on the 27th a house beyond Hooge was registered for the purpose of testing some new delay action fuses, Captain Miles observing from Hill 40. The house was hit and the shells burst inside the building, the test proving quite satisfactory.

*28th June.* Not engaged. On the following day we fired a shoot by aeroplane.

*30th June.* At 8.45 p.m. we fired on our night-lines till 9.15 p.m. and again from 9.35 till 9.45 p.m.

Total number of rounds fired up to date, 8,600.

*1st July.* Acted as counter-battery in a small bombardment at 7.55 p.m., engaging and silencing an active battery. On the 2nd, by order of brigade, fired at road-cutting near Hooge.

*3rd-4th July.* Not engaged. During the 4th about fifty rounds of 5.9" gas-shell were fired into the battery position. No damage was done to personnel, but some

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cartridges in an ammunition wagon were blown up. One gun-carriage was damaged and had to go away for repairs.

*5th July.* Engaged the battery who strafed us yesterday, on two occasions firing lyddite into it. Nevertheless we were again shelled at about 5 p.m., though no damage was done.

At this time the battery canteen was in full swing and good English beer and stout could be obtained. The first canteen was a little "summer-house" in the orchard, but later it had to be moved. Other commodities, like biscuits, soap, and cigarettes, were also sold, and such a feature made modest suppers possible. "Burghu" was a favourite dish at nights. One incident is recalled during the time the canteen was in the orchard position. The midday meal had been taken, and a score or so of gunners were enjoying an issue of beer from the canteen when Fritz began to shell, putting several rounds plus and minus of this happy gathering. Everybody ran for temporary cover with the exception of one Irish worthy who promptly "saw all the mugs and dixies off" before retiring himself. Thus in difficult and dangerous periods there was ever cropping up the spirit of fun and comedy, and such incidents tended to take the mind from the humdrum of routine and work. There is nothing of unusual note in the first half of July except that a 'plane working a shoot for us on the 13th was shot down by anti-aircraft fire, and on the 19th we took part in a small bombardment. Constant mention is made of Hollebeke Château. Built of solid masonry and having cellars underneath, this chateau was probably a German headquarters of some kind. Movement near this place had doubtless been observed by our aircraft, and thus it is often mentioned as target. On the 26th we fired forty rounds of mixed shrapnel and lyddite at a hostile battery. This brought retaliation, and after the series had finished, a good many rounds of 4.2" fell in front of the battery, but no damage was done.

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*28th July.* We registered a road junction on southern side of Bellewaarde Lake and also an angle of Zwarbsteent Wood by aeroplane. We attempted to register a road through Zwartelen, but the light was too bad and the 'plane obliged to return home. On this day occurred the incident connected with "Wagstaff Corner." It has been gathered from Sergeant (then Gunner) E. Holland.

On this day the officers' mess had moved their quarters to a house along the Vlamertynghen Road, and Gunner Wagstaff, after assisting in these arrangements and then partaking of his midday meal, had retired to an estaminet on the cross-roads, the day being a rather thirsty one. Fifteen minutes later a "silent Jim" burst through the gabled front of the house.

At this moment some seven men—mostly engineers and including Gunner Wagstaff—were sitting round the table, and two women were serving behind the bar. For a minute or two "everything was in the air." The two women, naturally presenting a very dishevelled appearance and smothered with brick-dust, made good their escape through the back of the house. The front door was completely smashed in, but Gunner Holland managed to crawl through and reach Gunner Wagstaff, who was buried by a heap of debris underneath the table.

Some infantry who were passing rendered assistance to the wounded men, for in addition to Gunner Wagstaff one of the engineers had been killed and three wounded. "Joe" Grainger, the battery medical orderly, then arrived, and recovering consciousness, Wagstaff asked how Gunner Holland had fared. He was then put in the ambulance, and subsequently made a good recovery in Angleterre. From this time these cross-roads became known to the battery as "Wagstaff Corner."

*29th July.* At 4.25 p.m. we commenced a counter-battery aeroplane shoot on guns near Kasteelhoeck, obtaining a direct hit the first round.

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*30th July.* At 3 a.m. the Germans opened a heavy fire on the British batteries, including our own. This effort was preparatory to their attack on our trenches at Hooge. We opened retaliatory fire on Château Wood, searching and sweeping with shrapnel to prevent their infantry massing. At 4.50 a.m. our observation officer reported O17 c to be shelling. It was therefore engaged and silenced, and at 6.10 a.m. we were called to engage three batteries east of Klein Zillebeke. This finished the first phase of battle. At 2.6 p.m. our infantry leading up to counter-attack, we fired at Hooge and trenches in vicinity, the actual assault commencing at 2.45 p.m. From just before midnight till 1.5 p.m. on the following afternoon—the 31st—we kept up a steady rate of fire on the trenches at Hooge. This operation was repeated from 6.40 p.m. till 7.24 p.m. At 7.40 p.m. we engaged our old friend O17 c, which was shelling 122nd Heavy Battery. At 9.20 p.m. the trench bombardment was again carried out.

Rounds fired up to date, 9,577.

*August.* The details of the first eight days of August is a continuous tale of the bombardment of Hooge, Zwarbsteen Wood,—where the enemy were reported to be collecting large quantities of timber—Bellewaarde Lake, and ground north and south of the famous Menin Road. On the 2nd Gunner Yarnton was wounded in the knee by shrapnel, and on August 4th, the anniversary of the commencement of hostilities, we completed our ten thousandth round.

*9th August.* After the previous series of bombardments which followed the loss of trenches at Hooge on July 30th, we took part in the final bombardment at 2.45 a.m. preceding the infantry assault by the 6th Division at 3.15 a.m.

The trenches east of Hooge wall were shelled, vigorously at first and then at a slower rate, until 6.15 a.m. We then switched on to a battery on the western edge of Gheluvelt, firing till 6.25 a.m., then switching

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back to trenches at Hooge Wall till 8.26 a.m. The battery came under heavy shrapnel fire during the early part of this bombardment, and Gunner Charlish was wounded in the ankle. He hobbled away, and when assistance came to be rendered he was discovered in the canteen sampling the barrel.

At 9 a.m. we engaged an active battery in front of Westhoek, and at 1 p.m. fired at a fort north-west of Stirling Château, from which place our infantry were being heavily bombed. At 2.50 p.m. we shelled trenches running east, just south of Bellewaarde Lake, where a counter-attack was in progress, shrapnelling the vicinity till 5.55 p.m.

Thus finished nine days of heavy work and consistent firing for the trenches at Hooge. These days, though summed up in the logs in terse and brief remarks, represented hard work on the part of all ranks. Shoots at night or early morning always meant difficulties and additional labour, yet throughout the preparation and bombardment the efforts on the part of the battery, and indeed the whole of the artillery, to give adequate support to our infantry, were tireless and ceaseless. No sooner was one shoot completed than the gun prepared for another, and never was there delay or hesitation in the performance of this vital programme. Nor was it carried out without interference, and on the early morning bombardments the Germans naturally retaliated very vigorously, not only on batteries but on cross-roads and other points. Shelling in the neighbourhood of the battery became so common that it often ceases to be mentioned in the log-book unless very heavy, or perhaps when a casualty occurred. Cross-roads were always a prominent feature with Fritz, and he could enfilade the Vlamertynghe Road with his 5.4" gun to an extent and with an accuracy that made it extremely uncomfortable for drivers or pedestrians on this particular route. The projectile which so often accomplished this feat was the subject of much

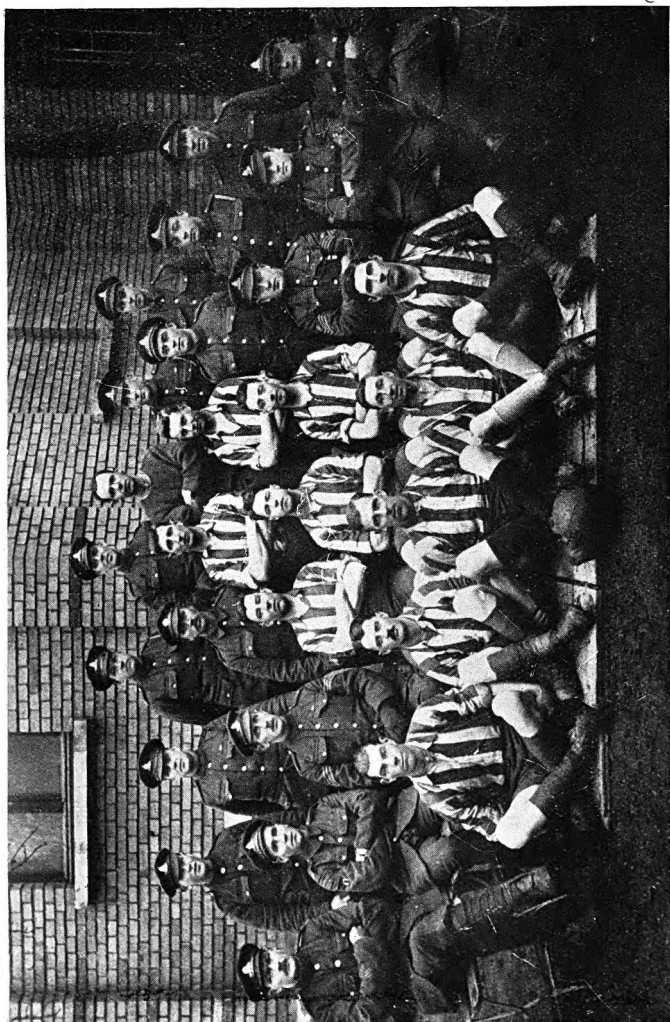
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discussion amongst the men. Some argued that it was a 5.9" shell, and others insisted that it was a 5.4". One day a dud was salvaged and "Tiffy" Walton was called to solve the problem with a pair of calipers. It proved to be a 5.4" shell. The ten days' preparation following the loss of Hooge was thorough, and its culmination, the bombardment and infantry assault on the morning of the 9th, resulted in the recapture of the town. In light of the big battles and engagements which followed later in the war, Hooge would hardly seem worth mentioning, yet, though it came to change hands many times, this success of August 9th sent a thrill of encouragement through England and it meant a deal to those who had fought for this cratered heap of ruins and bricks. To those who read any history of the War, Hooge will be a mere incident. For those who were in the Salient it was action, continual watching, disappointment and encouragement as the tide of battle ebbed and flowed; it was all those happenings which spell war.

*10th August.* At 12.45 p.m. we fired on a German observation post on Hill 55 just east of Hooge, and later at trenches on the eastern outskirts of the town. From 4.30 p.m. and for two hours we kept up steady rate of fire on previous O.P. targets, and late at night were again called out for retaliation on a hostile battery. The 11th saw no variation in this programme of trench bombardment and counter-battery work; indeed, the logs point to constant efforts to stifle enemy counter-attacks for the ground which had been so dearly won.

*15th August.* At 1.30 p.m. we shelled in succession three batteries south of Klein Zillebeke. Shortly afterwards the battery came under heavy shell-fire from a 5.9" high velocity gun, a 5.9" howitzer, and an 11" howitzer. The position was first shelled by each battery in turn, and then after a pause of forty-five minutes all three batteries opened simultaneously. Fortunately, men had been withdrawn and, with the exception of the destruction of the wireless aerial, no damage was sus-





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tained. Such an afternoon's excitement proved how thoroughly a battery position may be swept without any damage being done, though at the same time the battery was fortunate to escape so lightly. It was evident that the guns must have been doing good work to merit such exclusive attention, though this was a compliment that hardly appealed at the time. In addition to the fire of the three batteries mentioned above, a 17" shell dropped in the strip of uncultivated ground adjoining the orchard.

*16th August.* Engaged and silenced a battery south of Herenthage Wood, and on the following day a battery in front of Klein Zillebeke.

*18th August.* At 6.15 p.m. we shelled trenches near Hooge and south of the Menin Road, and soon after shrapnelled the neighbourhood of Klein Zillebeke to prevent the massing of infantry. We were not engaged on the 19th.

*20th August.* At 1.15 p.m. we shelled a battery south of Zandvoorde and ten minutes later directed fire on to the trenches at Hooge. Communication with the wagon lines was broken by shell-fire which was being directed by several German batteries on 12th Siege Battery (9.2" howitzers), who occupied a position off the Vlamertinghe Road, a few hundred yards from the "Goldfish Château." This hostile concentration included the 17", and this fact is worthy of mention because it was the only occasion within the knowledge of those in the battery that the enemy took the trouble to expend so large a shell on so small a target, though indeed the 12th Siege had done damaging work in the German lines and 9.2's were the heaviest pieces of artillery in this particular neighbourhood. One round per eight minutes was the quickest rate of fire maintained on one position, and this rate would suggest that the Germans screened two of these giant howitzers in the Forêt d'Houthulst, taking into consideration the time occupied in loading and firing one of our own 15" pieces.

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From an eye-witness, this concentration "ploughed and tore the ground to hell," though it resulted in comparatively little damage being done to the 9.2's.

When the line was broken—it ran by this same siege battery—Gunner Bean commenced to trace the wire from the wagon lines and Bombardier Hooper started from the battery position. During a pause in the shell-fire Gunner Bean ran forward to repair the break, but whilst in the act another 17" shell dropped within twenty-five yards and he was instantly killed. When Bombardier Hooper arrived at this point Gunner Bean had been removed by men of the 12th Siege Battery. The break repaired, Bombardier Hooper reported to the battery. During this shelling a large farm in rear of the 9.2's was set on fire.

*21st August.* Not engaged, but on the following day the left section moved to a position behind the convent, from where it was possible to obtain a greater arc of fire. Retaliation on hostile batteries occupied most of the programme on the 23rd, and "Big Willie" called for attention on the 24th. About 2 o'clock on this afternoon, whilst sitting on the top of a dug-out, Gunner W. Honeyball was struck in the head by a splinter from a 4.2" graze-fuse shell and instantly killed. His brother, Gunner A. Honeyball, had been killed on June 10th through an accident with a runaway horse at the wagon lines, and his brother had been granted special leave home to inform his people of these sad circumstances. The two brothers lie side by side near Vlamertyngh.

The last week in August saw a repetition of the previous work, with little to vary the monotony except the excitement of dodging shells. A note appears in the old log at the end of this month:

"During this month the battery and neighbourhood has been constantly shelled with a good variety of type and from three sides, a good bit of it evidently being intended for the road junction—Shrapnel Corner."

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Ammunition expended up to date, 11,656 rounds.

*1st September.* Shelled trenches on Ypres-Menin Road beyond Hooze. On the 2nd we repeated this operation and strafed a couple of active batteries. Calibration, counter-battery work, and registration occupied the first half of the month. On several occasions, when important reconnaissance had to be carried out from the air, batteries had orders to keep down anti-aircraft fire, and a number of such guns were included in our targets.

*13th September.* At 2.45 p.m. we ranged on a battery near cross-roads, south edge of Nonne-Boschen Wood. Following this ranging, we took part in conjunction with 108th H.B. and 123rd H.B. in a concentration on this battery. The programme was repeated at 5.15 p.m.

*14th September.* Engaged and silenced an active battery in action a mile west of Hollebeke. Later we fired forty rounds of lyddite at Shrewsbury Wood dug-outs. We were not engaged on the 16th.

*17th September.* As if to make up for the inactivity of yesterday, the battery commenced at 11 a.m. and, in conjunction with the 46th (Territorial, North Midland) Division, opened fire on trenches in Zwarbsteun Wood till 11.20 a.m. At 11.35 a.m. we fired salvoes at the same trench till noon.

*18th September.* We shared in an early morning bombardment of trenches at "Dead Man's Bottom," and at 2 o'clock commenced another bombardment of trenches around Hooze Château. Later in the afternoon we engaged a battery at the western edge of Nonne-Boschen Wood and shelled Hollebeke Château.

*19th September.* Bombardment again opened up early morning at trenches on western bank of Bellewaarde Lake, and at 10 a.m. at trenches in wood between "Stirling Castle" and Menin Road. Concentrations on Shrewsbury Wood and Bodmin Copse also engaged our attention.

*20th September.* At 4.55 a.m. the trenches at Hooze were bombarded. Interference from "Big Willie"

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was experienced at 10.45 a.m. and we had the pleasure of silencing this piece. The struggle for supremacy at Hooge still continuing, the guns searched the Menin Road with shrapnel. Heavy shelling was experienced by both sections on this day. Lieut. Goulding gave the order for men to clear, but as they were finishing and covering up several 8" shells dropped right into the position and Gunner Scullen was severely wounded and died the next morning. The left section were also heavily shelled at about 5.30 a.m. by a high velocity gun from Hill 60 direction, and Gunners Green and Wilson were wounded. When the remainder of the men had been cleared cries were heard from Wilson, and Corporals Goodwin and Rivett, returning, found him lying beside a tree with an ugly leg wound. Both men were carried from the guns to the B.C. post owing to the shelling of dug-outs farther up. An ambulance arrived and, whilst waiting, Wilson approached Green with the remark, "This does us for football this year, 'Dodger'!" He had already lost a deal of blood, which had been checked by an improvised tourniquet. Amongst the casualties on this day was a barrel of beer which was struck—so it was reported—by a splinter from one of the shells.

*20th September.* Extract from battery log :

"During the day both sections were heavily shelled from E., S., and N.E. by 8", 5.9's, 5.4" High Velocity and smaller guns. There were about 350 shells altogether. Three men were wounded, Gunners Scullen, Green, and Wilson. The cartridges in a wagon body were blown up and there were several minor damages such as poles, wheels, telephones, etc., but very little considering the number of shells."

*21st-24th-25th September.* These days mark increased concentration on the trench system at Hooge and culminated in a general attack on the morning of the 25th. The artillery bombardment commenced at 3.50 a.m., the right section standing by for counter-

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battery work. After the initial bombardment fire was lifted at 4.20 a.m. and again at 4.28 a.m. During this last programme the left section came under heavier fire than usual and experienced accurate shrapnelling from a hostile battery. However, our good fortune held, and no casualties or damage resulted. Many other targets were engaged in a hard day's firing.

*26th September.* Soon after noon we shelled Polygon Wood, and at 10.30 p.m. were called on to fire at trenches by Bellewaarde Lake owing to a local attack by the enemy. Weather proved too bad for work on the 27th and 28th, and on the 29th firing was restricted to strafing of Fort 13 in the trenches at Hooge.

*30th September.* At 3.35 p.m. we acted as a counter-battery during a local attack, to recapture about two hundred yards of trench lost at Sanctuary Wood on the evening of the 29th. A battery just east of Stirling Château was engaged on being reported active by our aircraft. At 5.14 p.m. we shelled a trench running south from Stirling Château and engaged "Little Willie" east of Groenelunde. He replied a couple of hours later. We therefore repeated the dose.

*September.* Ammunition expended up to date, 13,924 rounds.

Thus ends a month's work, a month full of trench bombardments and struggles for Hooge. Never would its pre-war inhabitants have believed that it would be infested with so much importance. By night and day it was the "rendezvous" of shells of all types; during weeks and weeks it was never free from fire. The battery itself met with constant fire—the entry of each "bumping" would provide monotonous repetition in any diary, and the records tend to discontinue mentioning every occasion—yet on practically each day in this heavy month the Germans retaliated vigorously whenever trench programmes or counter-battery efforts opened. That so few casualties resulted was just pure luck, and probably there was no other

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battery in the Salient which enjoyed such good fortune, having in mind the number of shells which fell in the neighbourhood. Neither was there any proper shelter to which men could retreat if not in action. They could only move to a place remote from the shelling and which itself might be under fire the next minute. The big preparations which led up to the attack on the 25th seem to have been part of the third Artois offensive when the Allies made attacks at Souchez, Vimy, and La Bassée.

*1st October.* "Not engaged." The whole month of October might be written down under the heading "Not engaged." Whereas 2,268 rounds had been fired in busy September, only 461 were sent over in October. All the old targets of interest had their share of this small number. Hooze Cutting, Stirling Château, anti-aircraft batteries in Polygon Wood, Bodmin Copse, and Hollebeke Château were fired on, and several batteries engaged with varying success. In addition, hostile trenches were bombarded and the road and railway near Zonnebeke shelled. Hostile fire was still fairly severe, and on October 9th, whilst returning from the battery position, Driver Thorn, A.S.C. (attached to the battery), was wounded, a shell dropping alongside the wagon he was driving. Corporal Langdon, who was actually nearer to the burst, luckily escaped. On the 12th we were heavily shelled by 5.9's from a north-east direction, but happily no casualties occurred. But if the battery was spared the heat of action there was plenty of other work, and during this month a start was made with the concrete dug-outs, which were about three hundred yards in rear of the right section. They were placed against the row of birches and willows which run parallel to the Vlamertynghes Road, and four big dug-outs were designed to hold all ranks. Each place was lined with a yard of concrete, and alternate layers of concrete and sandbags formed the roof. Some idea of the labour expended will be gathered when it is



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mentioned that seven thousand sandbags were needed for each retreat, and jokes about these useful and notorious receptacles became very common. Unfortunately, whilst occupied in the building progress and carrying out drainage schemes of the very work that was to ensure comparative protection, one man was killed and two wounded on October 30th. Several rounds of shrapnel burst overhead between nine and ten o'clock in the morning, and Bombardier Graham and Gunners Parker and Rampley made towards the road, following an order to clear. They had no sooner gained the road than a 4.2" shell fell right amongst them, killing Bombardier Graham and wounding his two comrades.

Generally speaking, summer weather held fine during July, August, and September, but the periods of rain in October obliged not a few of the occupants of the frail bivvies in the gardens and orchards to shift into some of the houses to escape from being flooded out. October marks the disappearance of "O17 c" and "O17 d" (Big and Little Willie), and no mention of either appears in the records till December 11th, when "Big Willie" again shows up. Either they were idle for two months—not a very likely proposition—or they were moved for the time to another front. At any rate their disappearance or inactivity, even for so brief a space, was very much appreciated. One gathers that there was a shortage of 60-pounder ammunition during the months of October and November. On the 19th there was heavy strafing of the battery position. Everybody was cleared, but Gunner D. W. Jones, not having heard the order and under the impression that men were in the adjacent dug-outs, remained where he was. When the shelling was over, men returning were very surprised and relieved to find him occupying the same position in the same dug-out.

*November.* To a large extent November resembled October. Only 638 rounds were fired, and construction

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of the dug-outs was continued. Leaves were thinning on the trees, and precautions had to be taken against observation by German aircraft. Such a working party, had they been seen, would have drawn heavy fire. On two occasions during this month the wagon-lines had to be shifted on account of shells falling in proximity. A good deal of leave to England was granted, and with a depleted number of men, additional work at wagon-lines and guns fell to the men remaining.

On November 2nd the left section were obliged to return from the convent position to their former emplacements, the gunpits being flooded out. When the guns were finally pulled from the platforms the water was up to the gun-wheels, and gunners had to take boots off and "wade into it." As for the gun-stores, Gunner Foster had to strip and perform a few diving operations before they could be salvaged. Such an incident is typical of the difficulties experienced on account of the low-lying nature of the country. In little more than a spade's depth one would reach water, and dug-outs of any size were impossible unless pumping operations were constantly in progress. Food continued good and plentiful, though there were many obstacles connected with the cooking. Why cook-houses in particular drew so much fire is a matter of conjecture, but our own establishment was certainly no exception to the rule, and it changed position a number of times and enjoyed quite a variety of escapes. Of these, Gunner Leech—battery cook during this exciting period—retains vivid recollections. It seemed as if the cook-house acted as a magnet to falling shells.

In firing operations the battery acted as a counter-battery in a pre-arranged artillery bombardment by the 17th Division, 9th Brigade, and 122nd and 123rd Heavy Batteries. On the day following (November 9th) we also took part in another attack, and several retaliation shoots were accomplished on features such as Hollebeke Château, Stirling Château, and cross-roads.

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On the 19th we took part in a counter-battery bombardment with 9th and 13th Brigades. Beyond this there appear to be no other outstanding dates or notable happenings during November. The usual amount of hostile shelling in the neighbourhood was encountered, and men now describe their actions during this period as similar to "rabbits being chased from hole to hole." There is something very amusing to men in the recollection of these episodes, for one can afford to laugh afterwards. Yet at the time it was an uncanny and uncertain game with death that men played. It seemed that Death was always very near, "only just round the corner," and in addition to the big physical strain of "action front," together with the continual fight against mud and water, such a life produced a great mental strain. Yet the spirit and confidence of all ranks held good, and whatever happened everybody was "game."

Continual shelling and escapes tended to introduce a fatalistic attitude with many. On one occasion two men dived into adjacent dug-outs on hearing the approach of a shell. One of the pair hit his head on a piece of iron as a result of this hurried move, and his neighbour, hearing an exclamation, came to render assistance, leaving his own dug-out. The next shell landed on the now empty abode, completely wrecking the place and putting the finishing touches on a new gramophone. Such are the tricks played by Fate!

*1st December.* Engaged and silenced a battery on south-west fringe of Nonne-Boschen Wood. Later in the day we shelled the wood itself. For the next three days we were not engaged, and building schemes were continued. On the 5th and 6th, in conjunction with the 13th Brigade R.G.A. we shelled a battery south of Groeneburg Farm at a slow and irregular rate.

*7th December.* We shelled trenches near "Stirling Castle," and the fire was reported to be effective. This shoot was part of a concentration by a considerable

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number of batteries on the "Castle" and the trenches surrounding it. The calibration which preceded this concentration was made by Lieut. Eyden from Crest Trench, Sanctuary Wood. Most of the observers arrived together and, from one who witnessed the preparation, the trench was "one long line of periscopes." Stirling Château was probably a German infantry headquarters, and it was practically demolished by this grouped concentration. The enemy, fearing perhaps that it was preparatory to a bombardment, retaliated vigorously all round the Salient. Our own particular part of the scheme was to search with shrapnel the trenches round the Château.

*8th December.* Fired lyddite into Zandvoorde in retaliation for the shelling of Ypres and also shelled a battery active near Ypres-Commines Canal north of Hollebeke, following reports by our aircraft. On the 11th our old favourite, "Big Willie," again cropped up for consideration after a welcome lapse during November and October. Châteaux at Hollebeke and Herenthage were shelled on the 12th.

*13th December.* At 10.25 a.m. we engaged three batteries north-west of Westhoek cross-roads and took part in a bombardment of trenches north and east of Bellewaarde Lake. During the morning series of counter-battery work, about thirty high explosives timed air-bursts, or "woolly bears" as they were called, burst over and in front of the guns. Second-Lieut. C. H. Goulden was fighting his section and giving orders from the "pulpit," a small erection behind "A" and "B" guns. Mr. Goulden walked from this point to No. 2 gun during the shelling and, being struck by a splinter, sustained a severe fracture of the arm. The wound having been dressed, 2nd Lieut. Goulden proceeded to Kruisstraat after asking Lieut. Harris to see that the shoot was finished. Having arrived at the field ambulance and no orderlies being handy at the moment, the driver gave Bombardier Turner, who

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accompanied Mr. Goulden in the ambulance, assistance to remove Mr. Goulden into the building. No sooner had they entered than an 8" shell scored a direct hit on the ambulance outside.

Sergeant Fenn and Bombardier Barker were also slightly wounded during this shelling, but were able to remain on duty, and the right section completed their shoot before leaving. At times it was possible for the wireless operator to establish a "shelling connection" when hostile fire in the neighbourhood was directed by German aircraft, and from signals taken it is evident that this particular shoot was controlled by wireless communication, the nearest shot being interpreted as "15 metres over."

*14th December.* We engaged a battery west of Nonne-Boschen Wood and also two others north-east of Hollebeke, and during the night we shelled the wood itself. On the 15th we fired at batteries in Château grounds and wood north-west of Hollebeke. Our own position was shelled on this day, and several people and places had rather exciting escapes. A frail dug-out on the Post Horn Road had a lively time, and Gunner Preston, sitting inside on telephone duty, was only saved by the intervention of a large tree-root which lined the wall of this retreat, the shell striking the "blind side" of the stump. The twentieth round dismantled the wireless mast, the operator only being detained by orders from going out to mend it. This operator—his name is not mentioned in the logs—moved to another battery soon afterwards and subsequently met his death in sharing with others the perils and hardships of the muddy Salient.

*16th December.* This was quite a busy day, and included a strafe on "Big Willie." At midday about a hundred rounds from a 4.2" battery were fired into the position, but no damage was done. Such experiences often occurred at meal-times and on not a few occasions "whether the dinner was sent west" was an anxious

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question. Sundays were also favourite days for these friendly attentions. We were not engaged on the 17th and 18th.

*19th December.* The enemy made a gas attack on the 6th Corps front at 5.30 a.m. According to a pre-arranged scheme, we therefore opened with a slow rate of fire on batteries in the following positions: north of Veldhoek, Herenthage Wood, south-west of Gheluvelt, south of Groeneburg Farm, and due east of this farm, fire thus being directed by a four-gun battery on no less than six hostile batteries.

At daybreak the gas alarm was given, and P.H. helmets were immediately donned. The first shell received disconnected all battery communication and targets were given out with difficulty. In addition, the wireless mast was again broken. When the firing had eased up slightly and men were returning to their billets a gas-shell burst just outside the concrete dug-outs. Several men were affected by the gas, but nobody very seriously. Gunner Seymour maintained telephone communication during the day in a splendid manner and kept one emergency line intact for all the period which included such heavy shelling. For this good work and for devotion to duty whilst the battery was in the Salient Gunner J. Seymour was awarded the D.C.M. We also engaged two batteries behind Klein Zillebeke, and at 3.20 p.m. fired on trenches north of Bellewaarde Lake.

*20th December.* Commenced the day by bidding "Little Willie" a hearty *bonjour*. During the afternoon we replied to batteries south-east of Klein Zillebeke and on eastern edge of Nonne-Boschen Wood and west of Kasteelhoek. The weather was poor up to Christmas morning.

*25th December.* Christmas morning was a lovely one with typical seasonable weather. In the morning some air-crumps burst near the position, but fortunately this expression of good-will and peace found "nobody at

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home." Every effort was made to make the occasion as much like Christmas as possible. Dinner provided an excellent repast. There was pork and beef, with a good variety of vegetables and of course the usual Christmas pudding. Two pints of stout and some fruit for each man was also included in the good fare. Captain Mackintosh visited the dug-outs and hoped that "next Christmas would see us all at home." There was a rum issue at night, and the battery canteen sold out of everything in the "beverage line." It might have been mentioned that during the month two "reinforcements"—pigs!—had arrived at the lines and had been carefully nursed up. Impressions are retained of the time it took to kill these two animals, but they lack official verification. At the observation post, events were not quite so festive, and those detailed on this particular duty had to wait till afterwards. A good story is told anent the O.P. on this day. The officer on duty, 2nd Lieut. Cailly, proceeded to the O.P. carrying a brown-paper parcel, and anticipations of a repast at the O.P. flashed into the minds of the men accompanying Mr. Cailly. About dinner-time he asked the men if they would like anything to eat. With visions of at least Christmas pudding or cake, Bombardier Thornley replied in the affirmative, whereupon Mr. C. solemnly opened the parcel of—bully beef! At this period Bombardier Thornley's name reminds one of the fuse-digging craze in vogue. Gunner T. Pope also displayed a propensity for all shapes and sizes of these interesting relics, and after patiently enduring shelling men would hurry out with pick and shovel in the search for fuses. The bombardier succeeded in unearthing quite a new type one day, and immediately ran across to communicate his find to the officers' mess in the following language:

"Sir, I have here a fuse never been seen before!" and this phrase "never been seen before" came to be applied to any fresh feature or souvenir. The particular fuse which Bombardier Thornley found enjoys the

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description of "a Japanese-made fuse captured from the Russians and fired by the Germans at the British in France and Belgium." Sometimes it would be possible to obtain a very rough location of a hostile battery by taking the direction of the fuse and the time between the flash (if observed from the O.P.) and the burst of the shell, but the beginning of organised flash-spotting in the Salient will be treated later.

*26th December.* At 2.20 p.m., in conjunction with a 3rd Division bombardment, we fired at wood and support trenches between Hill 60 and Ypres-Commines Canal. We were not engaged on the 27th.

The four remaining days of the year were busy ones, but nothing of special significance happened. We bade farewell to the old year by pumping shrapnel at Bodmin Copse.

Ammunition expended up to date, 16,637 rounds.

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*1st January.* We welcomed the New Year in the same manner as the old one was sounded out—by shelling Bodmin Copse. January was responsible for no outstanding incidents, less than six hundred rounds being fired in the course of the month. One spell of activity on the 15th might be mentioned, when we were called on to engage six hostile batteries at intervals between noon and 11.15 p.m., and on the 21st "C" sub-gun occupied a new concrete pit near "Esther's Farm."

Ammunition expended up to January 31st, 17,226 rounds.

*February.* At 11.50 a.m. on the 3rd we shelled Low Farm, one of the rounds causing a considerable explosion. Probably the building was used as a bomb store. On the 9th we registered by aeroplane a battery north of Veldhoek, a direct hit being reported, and we continued counter-battery work on guns near Klein Zillebeke and on the western fringe of Polygon Wood. There is an extract from records on the 12th which reads:

"At 4 p.m. it was reported that gas had been let out from the north-east, but the wind was the wrong way and most of it blew back. A further report stated that it was only smoke, probably to test the wind."

Busy days continued, and from 8.15 p.m. on the evening of the 14th till 8.30 a.m. on the 15th we fired 184 lyddite and 176 shrapnel at trenches and road between railway and road south of Hill 60 in support of our attack to recapture trenches lost east of Oosthoek and south of the Ypres-Commines Canal. On the 19th we fired at communication trenches and calibrated "B" sub-gun on the Westhoek cross-roads. During a series in the afternoon of the 22nd a large explosion was caused in the German lines. Jasper and Uhlan Farms were shelled on the 26th, and at 6.40 p.m. the enemy

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attacked near Hooge. Their communication trenches were shelled on receipt of "S.O.S. Canal." The enemy retaliated in rather unpleasant fashion, two hundred rounds of different sorts falling near. Fortunately there were no casualties. On the 29th we fired at Westhoek Chapel to calibrate "C" and "D" guns. A note appears to the effect that "The gun correction for 'C' is now +675 yards, and 'D' +850 yards."

Ammunition expended up to date, 20,260 rounds.

*March.* The shells fired during February—the first month which saw the dispatch of over 3,000 rounds—led everybody to believe an attack was imminent. With increase in artillery activity came nightly raids by both sides. Trenches were taken and lost frequently, and mines exploded by either side rendered these front positions uncertain and indefinite. One trench by the canal changed ownership so often that it was known as the "International Trench." The enemy enjoying a temporary success, had been beaten back by bombing tactics, and the "Bluff" position near the canal developed into a No Man's Land. The increase in fire towards the end of February, then, was to make the "Bluff" untenable for the Germans, and early March saw an attack launched to recover this bitterly contested right for possession. Both sides seemed equally determined not to yield, and supported their intentions by heavy masses of artillery.

Feints of heavy bursts by our guns deluded an anxious enemy into supposing that an assault was immediately forthcoming. The log-book reads:

"The last few days have been leading up to the attack which took place at 4.30 this morning to retake the 'Bluff,' trenches lost on the Ypres-Commines Canal. The artillery bombardment started at 4.32 a.m., following the infantry assault.

"For most of the day the right section fired at communication trenches behind their lines, and both sections engaged several batteries, some of the latter being reported by wireless. The only observation





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received was an "O.K." on one battery. The guns were manned till 9 a.m. on the 3rd, and during the night a slow rate of fire was kept up on a bridge crossing the canal near the point attacked. By the morning of the 3rd the infantry reported that the objective was entirely in our hands and the position consolidated. During the operations a considerable but inaccurate fire of gas and H.E. 4.2" shell was directed at the two sections. The casualties were one driver and two horses wounded. Ammunition was the most yet fired by the battery in one day: lyddite, 661; shrapnel, 384; total, 1,045 rounds." Fierce but unsuccessful counter-attacks were made, but the ground was firmly held. For a week there were heavy snow-storms, and during one operation the sights had to be cleaned out for every round. Westhoek cross-roads and Chapel seem to have been the object of particular consideration about this time. So much so that it inspired a battery poet to the following effort :

This is my story, this is my song—  
Right Section ranging all the day long ;  
Six thousand five hundred, time shrapnel load,  
We'll fire a salvo on the Westhoek cross-road.

The tune is readily recollected.

The 19th and 20th of March were rather exciting days. The report reads :

"At 1.50 p.m. a 5.9" howitzer battery began ranging on the left section from the north-east with an aeroplane, and at 4.55 p.m. they fired at a rapid rate, a 4.2" battery from the north-east and a 5.9" battery from the south-east joining in. Simultaneously the right section was shelled from the south-east, and at 6 p.m. a 5.9" battery fired about a hundred gas-shells at our billets; about a hundred rounds were fired at the right section and two hundred at the left. A shell under "C's" platform broke several planks and the sights were destroyed, being knocked against the roof of the emplacement. The gun

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itself must have been thrown two feet into the air. Bombardier J. Turner was in the emplacement at the time and his foot was jammed under the wheel and badly crushed. The weight had to be jacked off. A box of cartridges was blown up and several gun-stores destroyed. The gun was in action again at 11.30 p.m."

The 20th saw a repetition of hostile fire, and from 7.20 a.m. till 11.10 a.m. the left section was shelled. Bursts continued up to 6 p.m., 220 5.9" howitzers and 100 4.2" howitzers being thrown over. One shell struck a house on the left, and the terrific cloud of brick-dust which followed this hit encouraged the Hun aeroplane observer to signal back "Gros explosion."

This interception of enemy wireless signals by our own wireless operators was always interesting, provided there was a certain margin of inaccuracy in the hostile shelling. On the 27th the battery took part in the attack on St. Eloi. The log-book sums up the day :

"At 4.15 a.m. six mines were fired at St. Eloi. This was the beginning of our attack to secure some very prominent trenches at that point. The artillery bombardment commenced when the mines were fired. This battery did not fire till 4.45 a.m., when we shelled an area just south of St. Eloi at a steady rate. From 6.30 a.m. till 7.10 a.m. we switched on to tracks leading to the forward trenches south of Damm Strasse at a steady rate of fire. Practically only the right section was engaged in these operations. Throughout the day the guns were, when required, taken off these targets to do counter-battery work and then resumed on the area targets. Heavy retaliation was provoked, but the trenches were captured and held. The right section was on several occasions under shell-fire, one shell entering an ammunition recess by the gun, but no damage was done. All through the night fire was maintained, principally on batteries."

Work at night was accomplished under very difficult conditions. Only those who have actually taken part

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in such shoots know the severe strain on mind, body, and sometimes temper which is entailed. Yet a fine spirit of comradeship and indomitable resolution animated all ranks whenever difficulties had to be faced. Sergeant (afterwards Acting-Captain S. T. Bennell) received the D.C.M. in this attack on St. Eloi, setting a fine example of steadiness and dogged persistence in the face of enemy shelling. Nor was this recommendation consequent upon this single day; it was the result of qualities which had shone in many a previous tight corner.

Perhaps a deviation might be made to mention others who received decorations in this salient of salients. It is no easy task to write on such a subject, for we have a poor honours list for a regular battery and for this period in particular. The soldier knows that "by their honours shall ye know them" is not always a just criterion for gauging the worth and work of units. Yet these few distinctions are quoted with pride, and the recipients themselves would be the first to acknowledge that a more generous proportion would have been thoroughly deserved.

Major E. Miles ..	..	Military Cross.
Captain Mackintosh ..	..	" "
Lieutenant Eyden ..	..	" "
Lieutenant Goulden ..	..	" "
Sergeant Bennell ..	..	Distinguished Conduct Medal.
Sergeant Fenn ..	..	" " "
Bombardier Hooper ..	..	" " "
Gunner Seymour ..	..	" " "
Gunner Orsmonde ..	..	Military Medal.
Fitter-Gunner Walton ..	..	Meritorious Medal.

In May, 1916, the battery was mentioned in dispatches for work at Ypres. It is precisely this "mention"—a few terse words of praise in soldierly language—that one is very proud of. It sums up the endeavours of all who

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withstood the hardships of Ypres for so many weary months. It speaks for all ranks, for skill and enterprise in command, backed up by able N.C.O.'s and the stubborn "never-say-die" spirit of gunners and drivers. It were no exaggeration to say that the battery "made itself" in the Salient.

Details of incidents have been gathered where it has been difficult to fix an exact date. Nor are they isolated cases of invidious distinction; they are mentioned because they have been casually noted by the writer in subsequent conversations. There was the occasion on which Gunner Weeks single-aided held a gun steady for the few seconds which enabled the occupants of a gunpit to clear. The piece was being moved into the pit, some tackle broke, and it was only the promptitude of one man which prevented serious injury to others in the pit. Gunner Weeks sustained a wrenched back, but the gun lurched forward when the danger had been seen, checked and avoided.

Awards to Bombardier A. R. Hooper and Gunner J. Seymour were never more deservedly won. Throughout this harassing time they were jointly responsible for maintaining lines of communication, and right well they fulfilled their tasks. Gunner Orsmonde earned his decoration at "Wagstaff Corner" on the Vlamertynghe Road. During heavy shelling a R.F.A. transport had just reached the corner when a shell burst under the leading team. Orsmonde rescued and carried into safety a wounded driver under circumstances that evoked the warmest admiration of all who witnessed the incident. Fitter-Gunner Walton carried on splendid work in keeping the guns in order during this difficult period. Moreover, he preserved an optimism and infectious cheeriness of demeanour that were worth heaps in such times. His "scenic railway" which ran to the two guns will be remembered.

One could pause to mention other names, Sergeant Gordon, Gunners Atmer, Colenut, and Pope, names



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connected with incidents only typical of the general good work. Considering the notoriety of the environs and the hard weather, our list of casualties and sick was remarkably short. For thirteen months men dodged death in the quadrilateral bounded by the Vlamertynghe and Kruisstraat Roads, "Esther's Farm," and the renowned Post Horn Road. That the battery escaped so lightly from so many strafings is nothing short of miraculous. Those who tenanted these surroundings can all point to days or places where it seemed as though it was "only a case of time." Yet they have lived through to laugh in retrospect at these minutes of doubtful existence, though at the actual time of happening the humorous side was seldom seen.

During the latter part of the stay at Ypres bombing from the air made great progress on either side. A salient having its immediate rear more packed with transport and dumps than a "straight-line" sector, this district came in for heavy air attacks at night. The bombs crashed down in scores during these nocturnal raids, making still more unsightly the ruins of that splendid architecture which was the pride of Belgium's pre-war days.

There was a big arc of fire to cover in the position. It extended in the south to the west of St. Eloi and in the north to Pilkem Ridge, of which good observation was possible from Kruisstraat Chimney. This switch of activity covered an angle of 180 degrees.

Also about December, 1915, was organised the first real flash-spotting. Captain Firebrace, Intelligence officer, 2nd H.A.R., was in charge, and notes were exchanged between different stations on independent duty. O.P.'s were established at Elverdinghe, Brielen, and Kruisstraat Factory Chimney, the latter station being the central one for purposes of directing the observation of any particular flash. Quiet nights were the best for work, and the time between seeing a flash and hearing the report was taken by stop-watch.

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Bearings from grid north, times and other information were sent in to the 2nd H.A.R. and results compared. A good deal of useful intelligence was thus obtained.

Liaison work with the infantry also started and was productive of good results. The O.P. was worked from dawn till dusk and news was got through much more quickly.

*31st March.* On the last day in March the left section were relieved by the left section of the 1st Canadian Heavy Battery and moved back to take over from 132nd Heavy Battery.

With many feelings of relief the men moved off, the last sight seen along the Vlamertynghes Road being a four-horse team and two solitary wheels. The rest of the transport had been blown away. It was a typical reminder of many such sights crowded in the thirteen months' sojourn.

*April.* A fairly heavy strafe was taken part in on April 2nd, the right section supporting the attack on some crater trenches by vigorous counter-battery work. Unfortunately Bombardier Taylor was wounded in the foot during this operation.

Subsequent evidence cites that the Canadians had a severe handling in our old positions, and very quickly found out that salient life could be far from comfortable. The telephone system finally adopted in the Ypres position was very efficient. The object in view was to maintain communication after wire had been cut by shell-fire. The actual gun positions were the most frequently shelled. It was found advisable therefore to fix the central control station in a more or less neutral position, as all lines converged on to it.

*4th April.* The right section was not engaged but was shelled several times; one ammunition wagon was blown up and some small stores destroyed. At 6.30 p.m. this section handed over to the right section of the 1st Canadian Heavies, and the whole battery joined up at Steenvoord. The taking over of guns and equipment

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from 132nd Heavies was completed. The right section were hardly sorry to leave such a position. The excitement during the day was an appropriate farewell to such quarters. There is evidence that the Canadians who succeeded us fared no better than the right section. A welcome day's rest was taken at Steenvoord on the 5th, and then the battery marched to Hazebrouck, arriving at 11.30 a.m. and being billeted for the night.

*6th-10th April.* Line of march was taken via Nedouchelle, St. Pol, Croisette and Bouquemaision to Hedauville at 3 p.m. on the 10th, and the battery came under the orders of the 10th Corps. Nothing worthy of mention happened on the march, but the change in landscape and variation in scenery was very welcome after the monotonous stretches of dreary waste which had been seen in the salient. On the 11th a start was made with the preparation of the new position near Martinsart. The wagon-lines were situated at Hedauville. For the rest of the month the time was occupied in working in order to prepare a strong position. The environs were as pleasant as conditions can be in the firing zone, and the pits were dug in under a bank.

*3rd May.* Left section gun went into action at 9 p.m.

*4th May.* Continued work at position. Completed work consists of: three mined magazines completed, one half completed, a telephone dug-out completed, two emplacements as above and two emplacements dug out but not yet timbered.

*5th May.* The left section calibrated on a communication trench. Before proceeding, two events were mentioned during the month of April. On the 21st the wagon-lines moved back from Hedauville to Forceville. They had been in these quarters just a week when the small unpretentious mud and thatch village of Forceville was the scene of mild excitement. The battery were in stables, and saw a fire break out in the village. Sergeant Day, who happened to be in the village at the time, ran into the lines and the drivers at once double-marched

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to the scene. The main street was quickly reached, and near the pond a big farm, used as an ammunition store, was ablaze. Trench-mortar shells, bombs and grenades were exploding every moment. Detailed into parties, the men hastened to adjacent buildings which, being filled with straw, were in imminent danger of catching fire. These were cleared and a good deal of valuable property rescued. Not only the adjoining buildings were in peril, but the shooting up of Verey lights made the fate of any house in the village uncertain and increased the excitement in this pyrotechnic display. A chain of infantry passed buckets from the wells and pond, and the main work was to keep the fire from spreading. Regardless of the explosions, men went to the burning buildings and rescued a number of cows, goats and rabbits. Bombardier I. Lee was hit in the head by a splinter, but at length the men succeeded in their efforts and the fire was extinguished.

*6th May.* We fired in support of a raid at 12.20 a.m. A stage has been reached where it is impossible to follow through the daily operations without constant repetitions of "so many rounds fired on such-and-such a point," and an effort will be made to treat progress in a broader manner, reference being made to any feature which the log-book or memory prompt.

Mining operations continued till the end of May, and the firing was done by the left section, the right section finally coming into action at 9 p.m. on the 27th. On the 16th the left section had contributed a successful shoot by aeroplane co-operation, and obtained three direct hits on hostile battery emplacements.

*31st May.* On the 31st at 5.30 p.m. a shoot took place, the target being Courcellette chimney. The log has: "Ranging was done by taking intersections of the burst from three different survey posts. These usually meet at a point. The base of the chimney could not be seen; consequently only one high explosive was observed. Of the shrapnel about six were observed."

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*June.* The positions and pits having been finished, the four guns settled down to earnest work, and during June fired 3,366 rounds, the most fired in a single month up to date. As a comparison, the battery fired but 5,210 rounds in the first six months of its active service experience. The original notes do not indicate how many were fired per month. It is the log-book dated April 1st, 1915—June 18th, 1916, which first shows the number fired on each day. Other figures which are interesting are for August and September, 1915, 2,079 and 2,286 per month respectively, and for February and March, 1916, 3,034 and 3,048 per month. The harder conditions in the salient days intimate these latter efforts as very fine accomplishments. They were maintained in face of many dangers and difficulties, whilst a complete and welcome respite from enemy interference was enjoyed during the preparation for the great Somme offensive.

It was patent to all that a big attack was imminent. Artillery had been steadily arriving since Easter, and latter May and June saw a huge influx of guns and howitzers of all sizes. Every mound and valley was crowded with pieces, and aeroplanes displayed a corresponding increase in numbers and activity.

Such evidence of strength was appreciated by all ranks; it added something like a feeling of security and confidence in the future. Hitherto we had always borne with patience a fair amount of enemy retaliation, and in the salient days had fought against a superior weight of artillery. Now at last came the chance of good work without so much interference. There were numerous friends to take one's part in case of heavy retaliation by the enemy. The feeling was good. On a 2,000 yards front our artillery, if placed in a continuous line, would have stood wheel to wheel! It was a comforting reflection.

Yet the immediate future proved the need of such mighty support, for defence on the scale which confronted

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the Allies had never before been experienced. Only in subsequent advance over these lines of steel and concrete did we know what obstacles had barred the way to the attacking infantry.

The weather was none too good towards the end of June, and on the 23rd a violent storm broke and wreaked its fury on the whole of the valley. Dug-outs were swamped and emplacements flooded in this tempestuous outburst. Nevertheless increasing activity was evidenced in the fire of both sides. On the 19th during an aeroplane shoot the machine was hit and had to return to its landing ground. The 'plane dropped a message-bag to the effect: "Have been hit by Archie. Old bus falling to pieces—sorry!"

Against the 24th is an entry in the log-book:

"Artillery bombardment which is to last for five days before the infantry advance begins. Our work is entirely counter-battery except in the case of a counter-attack, when we may be called upon to fire on lines of communication.

"Called up twice by aeroplane and ranged on new batteries, in one case obtaining a direct hit on an emplacement. The other shoot was also reported O.K.

"In addition, we kept a battery that had been heavily engaged with howitzers under a constant rate of slow fire to prevent it moving. We also engaged two anti-aircraft batteries when we saw aeroplane in front being heavily fired at."

On the same day—a Saturday—many of the inhabitants occupying villages just in rear shifted their belongings to places which enjoyed more safety. One retains the impression of all kinds of vehicles being loaded almost to danger-point with an endless variety of goods and chattels. Weather still continued intermittent and rain and mist were experienced on the 27th and 28th, but the last sunset of June was lovely, its beauty enhanced amid the wreckage of the war zone. At brief periods—too brief—came cessations in the shelling. These few

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intervals of silence were almost as impressive as the heaviest bombardment. Big strafes had taken place on the last five days, which are named in the log-book "U," "V," "W," "X," and "Y" days. This seems to suggest that the original intentions were for the infantry to commence their assault earlier than actually took place.

*July.* July 1st dawned with the promise of a lovely day. It was misty early, but a strong sun soon broke through and gave scope for the programme of the aircraft. It was the first time in the war that we enjoyed such superiority in the air, and the attack on the German balloons towards the end of June bore testimony to this valuable advantage. At 6.30 a.m. an artillery bombardment of unparalleled intensity shook the earth. Never had such a thunderous assault been heard. From the spiteful 18-pounder and vicious French 75's up to the squat and ponderous 15" howitzer, all batteries seemed to vie with one another in fury and sound. The infantry assault followed exactly an hour later.

This first day, which had been described as the greatest one-day battle ever known in the world's history, is covered in the log-book by the terse report: "Acting as counter-battery during the bombardment—ammunition: 397 lyddite, 388 shrapnel; 785 rounds."

The amount of ammunition expended speaks for itself. It was more than had been fired in one month of some of the 1914-15 periods. Though the attack succeeded on the right, it was not immediately successful in front for the Leipzig Salient held out despite the fact that Ovillers was flanked in threatening manner. However, no respite was given to the enemy, and the battery continued to maintain a heavy rate of fire each day. On the morning of the 8th Captain Burney of the 4th Squadron R.F.C., was brought down by a grievous mischance of Fate. It was a misty morning and a British howitzer shell hit the 'plane, which crashed near to our own position. This gallant officer was a fine observer

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and pilot, and had often conducted shoots and given targets in which our battery had been engaged.

Those of the observation party who visited the trenches spoke of the battered condition of the front lines which were "dotted like the edge of a postage stamp." Views which had appeared fresh and untouched during the earlier days of June were now obliterated by the constant deluge of shells. This was perhaps the first battle of the war in which wire-cutting on a large scale was done by 60-pounders. Sometimes these shoots could be conducted by observation from the trenches, but the hilly nature of the country often necessitated the co-operation of aeroplanes. This applies to counter-battery work as well. Howitzers and guns could be hidden behind mounds and in valleys so as to make observation from any point except the air impossible. Good it was that our F.E.'s and de Havillands were sweeping all before them in the battle of the clouds. The observation 'planes—slow unwieldy buses—showed no less activity under this protection of fighting craft, and their wireless calls were insistent throughout the day. The battery also used balloon control on occasions, and the 14th mentions a shoot at 7.10 p.m. in which a hostile battery was shelled with high explosives. "Practically all the rounds were in the battery, and a large explosion was caused."

Good news came through that successes in the south were being continued and that the British cavalry had been in action; we were not without hope, therefore, that an advance in the immediate front would be achieved. Records show that a great amount of counter-battery work was accomplished in this month. In addition, working parties were dispersed, roads swept and the attacks supported. A note in the log sums up the month:—

"During the past month the battery has been doing mostly counter-battery work, but as the advance has progressed in the neighbourhood of Pozieres many hostile batteries in our range have been gradually withdrawn. The battery has taken part in most of the attacks, either



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in neutralising known active batteries or firing at lines of communication. It is the only heavy battery in the neighbourhood that hasn't moved forward, probably owing to the fact that we are opposite the pivot point of the advance and are well dug in. With the exception of one or two odd rounds, no shells have fallen near the battery."

The number of shells fired during this eventful month was 4,558.

*August.* August resolved itself into another month of heavy firing, mostly counter-battery work. There seems every indication that the German artillery was well dug in, and constant repetitions of fire were necessary to quench their ardour and activity. Some were reported by aeroplane and others by trench observation. On the 17th appears a note that a trench bombardment was carried out for the 48th Division, who had relieved the 12th Division a few days before. The Warwicks seemed to have gained a temporary footing in Thiepval, and brought in some hundred prisoners, with whose stamp and bearing one was most struck. Without exception they were men of fine physique. Several partially successful attempts were made to storm the Thiepval defences during this month, but they were strongly held in face of the most valiant attacks. Towards the end of the month are notes on wire-cutting. Lanes of wire were cut and persistent firing was necessary to keep the gaps open. Some difficulties were experienced, and two may be cited:—

*28th August.* "Wire very thin at south-east end, but is still thick in centre."

*29th August.* "Only about 10 per cent. of the rounds could be got into the wire."

Weather continued very hot, indeed it was most trying for the gunners who were called upon to work even harder than the efforts of July demanded. Good food was scarce. The chief diet for a long time was the monotonous "bully and biscuits." Water, too, had to

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be used very sparingly. It is a travesty of Fate in modern warfare that at the very time men need extra provisions by reason of extra labour, food is usually most scarce. A bombardment or offensive entails heavy sacrifices in living. So it was during the Somme. There was a continual cry for shells, shells and more shells. The transport seemed to exist for no other purpose save shells ! Perspiring gunners carried shell after shell to recesses and dumps, but more often than not the whole battery's food for the day could be carried to the cook-house by one man. The higher authorities favoured "iron rations" with a vengeance ! This month was also notable for the introduction of the zone-call system in aeroplane-artillery co-operation. The old method had been to report targets first to artillery headquarters, from whence they were allotted to different batteries. The amount of artillery at disposal, however, gave scope for a speedier and heavier retaliation than had previously been the case, and batteries now fired directly on receipt of a target. It was an innovation which came to stay and accomplish great results. The month ended with rather indifferent weather. Nevertheless, a constantly heavy rate of fire was maintained, and the number of shells fired in August was over 6,000.

*September.* The month began with heavy bombardments and daily returns of ammunition at once show an increase. It was evident that a final effort was to be made on the difficult Thiepval ridge with its deep entrenchments and subterranean passages. Practically every day saw a bombardment or big counter-battery scheme carried out. Raids, rehearsals and barrages were "the thing," though good weather was intermittent. On one occasion a violent artillery bombardment took place without any action by the infantry, till the harassed enemy hardly knew what to expect next. Moquet Farm was carried and the "Wonderwork" stormed. The 14th and 15th were good days. The following are two telephone messages concerning them which the writer preserved :—

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(1) Thursday, 14th. Attack 6.30 p.m. "The infantry got over excellently at zero minus 2, but some advancing at once got caught in our barrage. I lifted our barrage to zero minus 1—7.36 p.m.

"Our infantry are sending up flares. The Germans appear to be using green lights to denote their front trenches.

"The general congratulates the artillery on the rôle they played in to-day's proceedings. The Canadians took their objective and 300 prisoners."

(2) Friday, 15th. Attack 6.20 a.m. "The big push to our east is going well; all objectives are taken and His Majesty's Landships are having the time of their lives, and were evidently a complete surprise for the Germans and were a great success."

Thus the first news of the tanks and our first sight of these ungainly creatures as they came waddling back from the scene of their victory.

The battery supported both these attacks by very heavy counter-battery fire. Simultaneously came news that the French on the right were enveloping Combles. It was a week of successful operations. From the 17th to the 21st was a period of poor weather, but better conditions obtained on the 22nd, though it was a trifle misty. Wire-cutting on an extensive scale show the preparation for the subsequent attack on Thiepval made at 12.25 p.m. on the 26th.

One retains a vivid impression of the enormous artillery fire which supported this attack. In addition to the ordinary programme bombardment on trenches and hostile batteries, this operation yielded good evidence of the use of the zone-call system. "Massed infantry" targets came in continually, and it was a treat to see men redouble their efforts when they knew of such targets. The guns vied one another in rates of fire. It seemed remarkable that the Germans were exposing themselves so much, but one theory was that their reserves came from Russia and were unaware of the command of artillery

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that we enjoyed. A large number of prisoners flocked into the camp which had been prepared near by. On this memorable day the battery fired over a thousand shells, the second occasion on which this feat had been accomplished. The following notes are interesting:—

September 25th. "No. 1 gun condemned and taken out for refitting with new piece."

September 28th. "No. 2 gun condemned—taken to workshop for overhauling and new piece."

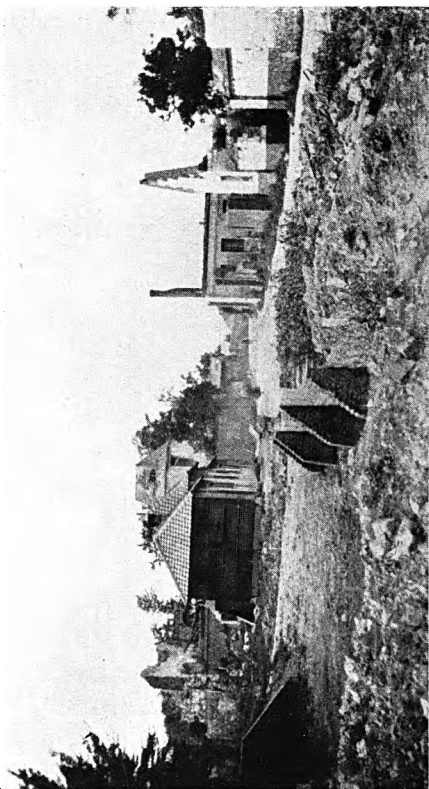
"No. 3 gun condemned—still in action."

"No. 4 gun condemned—still in action."

The first day of the month saw the arrival of the new section with two guns, and for the first time in its history 24th Heavy Battery consisted of six guns. Use was promptly made of this addition, 8,589 rounds being fired. It was indeed a month of records.

*October.* October 1st saw a brisk bright day with a touch of autumn in the air. The clock was put forward an hour, an aeroplane shoot was carried out during the morning on enemy wire, and a German counter-attack smothered in the afternoon. No. 1 gun proceeded to the new position near Ovillers—quite a busy day. The pull-in to the Ovillers position was a difficult one and required all the skill and determination of the drivers. The last part was over a very rough track and it speaks well for all ranks that the guns were hauled into position without accidents. There was no road, and one of the guns was only got into position by harnessing two teams of horses to the piece. All the men also heaved on the drag-ropes. One tremendous exertion by this united power would move the gun forward but a few yards. By continuing such efforts over a long time it was ultimately hauled into the hastily prepared pit. An official photographer, passing at the time, secured a "snap" of this "move through the mud." On the 5th Nos. 3 and 4 guns proceeded to Ovillers, and finally 5 and 6 followed on the 7th.

The six guns lay together in line on ground which



RANSART, LOOKING TOWARDS BELLACOURT.



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had been the original German front line trenches on July 1st. This line had been taken, lost and retaken before the final issue decided itself in favour of the British, and the ground coming under successive bombardments of fearful intensity was churned up and battered at every turn, and the debris of war was everywhere.

Barbed-wire entanglements immediately in front of the trenches reached to a great depth, and many gallant fellows had met their death in this maze and hell of wire. Discarded equipment lay everywhere; tools, weapons and clothes, they all spelt Death! The infantry had put up crosses to mark the graves, yet by far the greater number were indicated by a cloven stick into which was thrust a card bearing the name, rank, regiment and date of death. Many of these were subsequently washed away by rain, destroying for ever the chance of tracing and befitting the last resting-places of these heroes. Often there were but bits of wood, from the side of a "bully" box perhaps, stuck in the side of a trench with the details in pencil. And sometimes one found that always pathetic inscription, "An unknown comrade."

"No man's land" was a big stretch. The infantry had come against the wire, the deadly barrage of shells and machine-gun fire, at a walking pace! Well may historians be unable to adequately pen their noble resolution.

This was the first sight that many had of the solidification of the German defences on the Somme. Dug-outs extending to a depth of thirty and forty feet marked the whole of the front line, and in communication trenches and supports were caverns large enough for stores of food, clothing and ammunition, and for the safe working, even during an intense bombardment, of a large dressing-station. Machine-gun emplacements were strongly built in ferro-concrete such as to defy anything but a very big shell. This must have meant the transport of hundreds of tons of material to even one small district. Obviously

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every foot of timber was taken from French forests, and the pieces cut and numbered behind the lines all ready for fixing together in the trenches. It was a triumph of enemy organisation and thoroughness.

Beds, tables, doors and stoves, with the addition of mirrors, shelves and other conveniences must have made trench life a comparatively safe and comfortable existence in normal times. Communication cords running down the stairs gave immediate alarms for gas or action.

A local attack was the first "stunt" in this position. It was entrusted to the Cheshires, who had stayed the previous night in the adjacent dug-outs. The attack started at 12.30 p.m., and 83 prisoners were taken, 30 of whom ran through the barrage to our lines. The Cheshires returned next day at below half strength, but laden with all the trophies of war imaginable. They told us that the artillery barrage was accurate and well timed. The capture of a ridge by this attack gave opportunity for better observation, and on the next day no fewer than twenty direct hits were scored on a German field battery.

The 13th was rather an unpleasant day, for Fritz displayed partiality for a field battery immediately to our rear. Had not his shelling been so accurate, we might have caught some uncomfortable "shorts."

The battery supported by trench bombardment an attack by the North Lancs at 2.45 p.m. on the 14th, and for the first time used the new "DX SK" gas shells. The Germans made a big counter-attack on the following night, but lost heavily. Many enemy batteries came to be quite well known by reason of their activity. One of these was officially described as "U5." On the 16th from 11.45 a.m. till 3 p.m. this troublesome customer was the object of our particular attention, and over 200 rounds were distributed into it. Thirty were reported as clean hits, whilst the greater majority fell very close. From this point "U5" disappears from the log. The enemy shelled the road on the left, and Corporal Kitchener was wounded in the head. One gun was also put out of action.



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A wire-cutting shoot by aeroplane on the 20th preceded a big attack at 12.5 p.m. on the 21st. The order of opening was: 12.5 p.m., field artillery; 12.6 p.m., 9.2's and 8"; 12.7 p.m., 12"; 12.8 p.m., 60-pounders.

All objectives were taken, together with 1,600 prisoners. Infantry, artillery and motor-transport targets crowded in all day. Sergeant "Buggy" Elliot stood by the telephone-hut, megaphone in hand, bawling out angles and ranges for hours till he was hoarse in the throat and red in the face. On the 22nd the German regimental headquarters at Grandecourt were treated to gas-shells. The dose was repeated and increased for the next two days.

Often a whole page of the log is taken up with wireless targets alone. "Twelve mixed" was the usual reply to such interferences, and there was a large number reported each day. When weather turned wet the conditions were very heavy, and walking about was a process of dragging one foot after the other. What the salient was for water the Somme was for mud! Food began to be more plentiful and mail more frequent. A battery canteen was instituted, and a fair number of supplies obtained. The first barrel of beer was laboriously rolled up from the road and found to be too large for the canteen doorway. The battery "spokey" thereupon increased the dimensions of the entrance. Further he decreased the weight of the barrel.

Mist, rain and wind spoiled the latter end of the month, and impeded operations. Shoots on wire were carried out by wireless observation on the 26th and 27th, and were very effective. So ended October, another month of heavy firing and success. 8,501 shells were sent over.

*November.* November brought a slight improvement in the weather, and the 1st and 2nd were good enough for aeroplane shoots. On the 3rd some fifty 5.9" shells fell in the battery vicinity, and two direct hits on mines were sustained, but without any loss of life. The 4th

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also provided a touch of excitement, the back-fire from one of the guns setting some cartridges ablaze. In saving another box Gunner Davies was severely burnt, but he received the Military Medal for his prompt and plucky action. High winds gave a chance for the ground to dry up, but rain on the 6th and 7th spoilt the good effect, and the condition of the infantry as they trudged back from the trenches showed what a miserable state the front line was in. Finally the weather showed signs of improvement. There was plenty of ground mist, but the sun shone brightly and preparations for the Ancre attack were renewed by concentrations on roads, tracks and groups of batteries. The log-book becomes even more terse with such remarks as "Concentration D" or "Programme Target B." These bombardments culminated into a grand burst at 5.45 a.m. on the morning of the 13th.

At the time of attack it was very misty. Only the spurts of neighbouring batteries could be seen, but a fearful din indicated the strength of support. Beaumont Hamel and St. Pierre Divion dispatches covering this period mention that in this attack the number of prisoners taken exceeded the attacking force. A few hostile rounds caused some inconvenience. A party of men by one of the guns had very lucky escapes, and the wireless aerial was also dismantled. Many of the prisoners were very young, and expressed entire satisfaction at their new circumstances. The day following saw the capture of Beaucourt and was remarkable for the artillery activity displayed. Two big bursts were fired at infantry targets reported by aeroplane. Hostile shells just in front churned up remains of our gallant French Allies, who had been killed on this front the previous year. Evidently time had only allowed of a hasty burial. War is no respecter of life. It respects not even the sacredness of Death!

The 18th saw a big attack on Grandecourt. Snow fell in the morning and turned to cold rain and an easterly wind.

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Wireless reports indicated German artillery activity and O.K. observations were obtained on a party of 400 infantry. Excellent work was done by the observation party throughout all the offensive. Telephone lines are peculiar contrivances, liable to upset the most detailed and careful calculations. Earth returns had been used at the beginning of the war, but the Somme battle saw the innovation of metallic circuits and the commencement of the "central control" system. Different brigades, batteries and units were allotted names by which each was called up. For instance, "Château" might be the name of a headquarters, and various batteries under its command would be named "room," "ceiling," or "door." A well-known battery character received a call one evening. He found that the caller required "bathroom."

"Yes!" ventured this battery worthy, "and you sound as if you could do with a wash."

Unfortunately the call was an urgent one, and the demand came from an officer of no mean rank.

Previously the Germans, with their characteristic ingenuity, had "tapped in," and made use of our telephone messages. They had used the railway line at Ypres in this respect.

"Regina," "Hessien," "Stuff" and "Schwaben" are all familiar names to those of the observation post. They recall many a weary journey and exciting moment in the quest for targets and suitable "O. Pips."

The work of aircraft was distinctly encouraging and the squadron who conducted our shoots and sent most of the targets within our zone of fire, the 4th Squadron R.F.C., did particularly fine work in artillery co-operation. During the month of July, machines belonging to this squadron had totalled 1,017 hours 45 minutes of work in the air. In fighting, bombing and observation our different types of machines were irrefutable masters.

Some jolly evenings were spent in these old dug-outs at Ovillers. They may have been shell-proof, but Nature's forces are more irresistible, and the wet

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penetrated the chalk covering and wooden ceilings in uncomfortable fashion. False roofs, gulleys and holes in the floor somewhat remedied this defect, but the chief defences were jests and light hearts. Rats of uncommon sizes also tenanted these abodes and ventured out in search of food at night. Many were shot with German rifles which had been found lying near the position on arrival.

A period of a week's aeroplane inactivity took place from the 28th, and there was a little respite for men and guns towards the end of the month, which, however, broke another battery record in witnessing the firing of 9,834 rounds.

About this time Major E. Miles, M.C., proceeded on leave to the United Kingdom, and this unostentatious departure was the last that the battery was destined to see of Major Miles in the capacity of its commander. Emergency or military orders prevented Major Miles from saying "good-bye" to the men whom he had commanded for such a long time and during such difficult months. Otherwise we feel sure that the formality and rigidity of army rules and regulations would have been dispensed with *pro tem.*, and that the Major would have spoken a few words, especially to the original members, for his service with 24th Heavies extended over some seven years, and his command over nearly two years. This latter period covered some of the hardest fighting the battery had faced, and that our guns created such a record at but little sacrifice was in no small measure due to qualities of skill, foresight and clever judgment in leadership.

We in the ranks followed blindly when we could not clearly see the way—and the immediate future was only too often hazy in those early days. But having faith in leaders and a keen sense of "seeing through" our little duties, we pause in retrospect and hoped that we helped lessen in some small degree the hard task and great responsibility which fell successively upon Major H. E. J. Brake, Major E. Miles and Major J. G. C. Leech,

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the latter of whom now took over command. Major E. Miles was acting as Brigade Commander when he left to take over other and higher responsibilities.

*December.* On the first day of the month we shared in an artillery bombardment by the 61st Division by firing at Puisieux and River Trench. A break of the mist on the 4th was followed by another spell of dud visibility, but spirits were raised by rumours of a rest and on the 10th the battery marched to Hedauville and were taken by lorries to Beuaval, a small town some five kilos south of Doullens. This was the first official rest that the battery enjoyed in France, and after a period of nearly two and a-half years, who shall say it was not well deserved!

The men were billeted in a rather airy barn, but the change from the monotony of the line was much appreciated and celebrated, moreover, in no uncertain fashion. Doullens and Amiens were accessible, and there were concerts, Y.M.C.A.'s and sports for diversion. In the latter the battery did really well, beating 114th Heavy Battery in both of the mounted events. After an enjoyable ten days, the battery returned to old scenes and haunts.

Unfortunately the time was marred by casualties at the wagon-lines on the 18th of December. They had previously moved to a position on the outskirts of Aveluy Wood, and at about 10 a.m. in the morning were engaged in grooming when a high velocity shell burst right into the line of horses. The next shells fell into the wood and then into an adjacent field well over. By this the men had "cast off" and taken cover under a bank and the shelling ceased. All was quiet until after dinner, when there was a renewal. The first shell fell just off the cookhouse and men once more "cast off" the horses. The ration-wagon arriving with the day's supplies, now approached the cookhouse, and had just reached it when a shell burst "right amongst the dixies." Bombardier E. Rylands, Gunner W. Warman and Gunner D. Lee were

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killed by the burst, and Driver A. Banyard mortally wounded. Four heavy draught horses were also killed during the shelling. The three comrades were buried in Aveluy Cemetery. It was probably the same high velocity gun which was wont to shell Aveluy that caused this unhappy loss.

The finish of the month and year saw dull overcast weather and less than the usual amount of firing was done. The advent of Christmas released a few more men for leave to England, and considering the weather and environment a happy time was spent on Christmas Day. Salvos were sent over at breakfast, dinner and tea times to ensure some proportion of excitement for the enemy. "Battery salvos" were usually a part of one big corps salvo. They were very frequent and must have been quite embarrassing to the other side. Many of the men sat up on the 31st to herald in the new year. To each of us it seemed that 1917 must be the year of victory. Most of the batteries fired a salvo at midnight, but these were mere bursts in a period of dull activity. But a spirit of confidence animated all ranks, inspired by the happenings of the past six months. We saw the gains without the losses. Our narrow vision was limited to one single front and the victories on that one front summed up our knowledge of the great war. The Somme battle was undertaken to relieve pressure on other fronts, principally Verdun; it was a defensive-offensive. That the whole of this precious ground should be lost and retaken before we should see the dawn of victory never entered our realm of thought. Germany had offered peace terms during December. We heard them whilst on rest at Beauval. They were impossible terms and were immensely unpopular amongst the French people, who derided their purport with characteristic gesticulations. But at any rate it was good to hear the word "peace," and a week or two later President Wilson issued his first peace note.

\* \* \* \* \*

1917

*January.* The new year did not bring new weather till a week had elapsed, when attacks on our left were vigorously supported by counter-battery work. One big raid was started in very misty weather which later turned to snow. There was no respite for the enemy. Every day saw minor attacks, raids or frequent corps salvos. A good deal of our fire was on targets in Miraumont and Pys, and Irles and Boom Ravine also appear often. An attack was made on Beaucourt Ridge early on the 17th. Thick snow fell, but the objectives were gained. Weather continued very cold and it was indeed an exceptionally severe winter. Men who marched back to Aveluy for the luxury of a bath discovered all the pipes frozen. The water-cart was frozen, and to obtain water for meals was a matter of difficulty. Men went out with sandbags to collect the ice from shell-holes. This was melted and boiled up to make beverages which would have been uninviting to a visitor, but which to men on active service was "the thing." Clearer days opened up, but it was still extremely cold. A "restaurant" was fixed up near the cookhouse in this position. Periodical services were conducted in this unpretentious shanty by a genial black-bearded padre. His talks were very homely and encouraging. Some of us missed him afterwards when we came to leave the corps, but some of these fine gentlemen flit across the memory of one's active service experience. It is the smallest and most insignificant impressions of men and things which remain when big bombardments are wellnigh forgotten.

*February.* On February 1st detachments started digging pits at a new position in front of Thiepval Wood. A good deal of preparation on the 2nd led up to a successful attack on River Trench and Pozieres Trench on the 3rd

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and quite a number of prisoners were captured. On the 6th the battery moved to the Thiepval position, a very cold and bleak-looking place. At last the weather showed signs of breaking and minor attacks somewhat livened things up. The enemy evacuated Grandecourt after blowing up all the dug-outs.

A big attack followed exactly a week later, though it was very misty. A large batch of prisoners straggled wearily along the road, and the German artillery reply in this attack was extremely weak. A period of heavy mists set in and on the 24th rumours came that we had entered Petit Miraumont and were pushing on as far as Pendant Copse. Enemy patrols were encountered and captured towards Irles, and there was every sign that the Germans were taking advantage of the mist to cover retreat.

*March.* Early March saw a continuation of this retreat. There was evidence that the enemy had removed his batteries far back and targets were very limited, and those which came through were at a good range. Bleak winds from the north brought snow and rain but two guns were moved forward to Grandecourt on the 10th. The 11th gave opportunity for aircraft, especially in the late afternoon. The majority of the enemy's new positions were spotted and heavily shelled, subsequent observations from the 'planes being most encouraging. Two more guns followed to Grandecourt on the 12th, and on the 14th two sections were pushed forward to Petit Miraumont, but by this time the Germans had completed their evacuation to the Hindenburg Line.

Grandecourt and Miraumont were in a state of desolation much like Thiepval. The heavy rains had turned these places into veritable quagmires, and roads were more like streams. In these difficult moving operations the work of drivers and horses was put to severe tests. It reflects credit on their efforts that such progress was made, often on poor food and with little or no chance of drying clothes. Had the mist not prevented observation from the air to such an extent,



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the enemy would never have finished this retreat with such comparatively small losses.

We moved forward to Irles on the morning of St. Patrick's Day, March 17th. The sun was shining his best and the news that Bapaume had been entered was a good tonic. Everywhere was sign of the hurried retreat of the Germans and warnings by our own engineers against entering various dug-outs and buildings. Achiet-le-Grande was reported as not being a safe target and cavalry patrols were passing the position all day, amongst them the dusky Bengal Lancers. All air work consisted of infantry contact patrol, and it was evident we should soon be out of range.

Orders however, were to "pack up" and to proceed out of the line. The night of the 19th rained terribly hard and swamped all our frail shelters, so that men were glad to reach the wagon lines at Senlis again. As preparations were being made for a line of march the Q.M.S. hastened to clear the stores of surplus clothing, and after such conditions as had been experienced the change was much appreciated. Six moves in as many weeks in the Somme sector was a great strain on men and horses, and considering the heavy going and hard weather, remarkably few cases of sickness occurred, though the horses showed signs of extra work. It was indeed small wonder.

Thus ended the great Somme battle with its fierce fights and varying fortunes. Never had such preponderance of artillery faced each other as in this offensive and never had accuracy been so sacrificed to quantity. The tasks were too many and heavy to trouble very much about accuracy. In such crowded areas there was always the feeling that if one target were missed another might be hit. Often on our own side, one battery would suffer severely as a result of the discovery by the enemy of another unit in proximity. Batteries crammed together on all the fronts and over-lapped one another in the desire for suitable positions. At every opportunity, and even

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when the advance made quickest progress, guns pushed forward to positions which in normal times would have been deemed impossible for artillery to live in. Big pieces as well as small field guns shared the honours.

During the offensive we fired 55,201 rounds. The number for the corresponding period dating from June, 1915, was just over 14,000. They illustrate the change introduced into artillery tactics by this battle.

The N.C.T. charge was used for the first time at Martinsart, taking the place of the old cordite modified tubular charge. This new charge made a very violent explosion, shook the carriages, and was a bigger strain to the gun-crews. Often at night all the "siege lamps" in the pit were blown out by the concussion. The amount of firing by the guns themselves upset all previous and pre-war ideas as to the life of a 60-pounder. Considering the number of rounds, visits to the ordnance factories for overhauling or for new pieces were very few, and the artillery well stood the extra demands for work, tribute to the arsenal of the town from which the battery had first set out.

On the 21st, line of march from Senlis was begun. Owing to insufficient horses, two guns, teams and sections had to be left behind at Senlis. Herissart was reached at 8 p.m., and the next evening saw Beauval again, scene of the Christmas rest. The roads were poor and a blizzard of snow and sleet made the journey rather unpleasant. Two horses had to be destroyed and another left behind at a time when every one was needed. However, two days' rest were enjoyed at Vacquerie-le-Boucq, and on the 25th four motor-lorries were attached to the battery for hauling the guns, which forged ahead on the next day. By the 28th the lines were fixed at Noeux-les-Mines and the gunners at Mazingarbe, and taking over from 140th Heavy Battery, R.G.A., we came into action at 3 p.m. under the 1st Corps.

The atmosphere of the surroundings was totally different from those we had so recently left. From the

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debris and mud of the Somme, the guns now fired their hate under the shadow of a busy and peaceful village, which continued its existence as though no such feature as war had ever been invented. On our immediate right and stretching away to north and south loomed gigantic fosses. It amazed the visitor to find that mines in front were being worked and that the women folk kept to their tasks in order that comfort of the home should not be denied to these toilers. It was a case of mutual consent that the work went on, for the Germans were also producing coal on the other side. Nevertheless the civilians were not immune from shell-fire. Yet they kept to their work and homes in tenacious fashion; a French soldier who enjoyed his "permission" in *Philosophe* witnessed the tragic death of his aged mother by shell-fire during our sojourn in this sector. Another family, taking refuge in the cellar, were wiped out by a gas-shell. It was a repetition of the case of the houses in the Ypres position. The French people like their Belgian neighbours clung to the little that war had left them in a spirit of fortitude which was as pathetic as it was admirable.

People went from place to place for visits and shopping right by the gun-pits. They sold eggs and coffee, papers and souvenirs, and did our washing. The cafés and estaminets were open just like a base town. The position we had taken over was in keeping with these features. From a "show" point of view the battery was a model one. Every convenience was at hand in the neatly-constructed gun-pits, and the recesses were fitted with electric lighting. Coming from the mobile campaign of the Somme, where guns had been hauled into all sorts of places without a thought of comfort or camouflage, this position seemed a revelation of order and methodical arrangement.

*April.* But we were soon to work, and the week before Easter provided abundance of firing though the weather was bad for observation. The observation post was

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within easy distance of the battery on the adjacent fosse.

There was early evidence that the ascendancy over enemy aircraft which had been gained in the Somme sector did not obtain in this region, for the Germans were very active in air work. They conducted their wireless shoots by aeroplane with ostentatious daring and were very busy in the early morning when the direction of the sun's rays gave them so much advantage. One German pilot, flying an all-red machine, appeared to be particularly enterprising. He was nicknamed the "Red Demon."

A 12" gun opening up in front of us was quickly spotted and given a hot time from 7 a.m. till 8.30 p.m. during the first week in April. The enemy rained 8" and 5.9" shells into their position and, being so near, several of the rounds were not a little discomfiting. The rumble of distant strafing was continual to the south near Vimy, and activity in our own sector materially increased. The final attack was launched on Easter Monday, and by an extreme switch we were able to put in some useful counter-battery work. Though a blizzard of snow commenced early in the morning, our planes came out and did wonderful work in observation.

The left section at Philosophe came in for heavy hostile fire on the 10th and had one gun put out of action by a 4.2" shell. They were further ranged on by an aeroplane on the 12th, but happily no casualties occurred. Heartening news came through of the success of the Vimy attack despite threatening weather, and the announcement that the United States of America had joined the Allies made this a momentous week. Road searching and trench concentrations continued by day and night and a lot of O.P. shooting was carried on. The civilians assured us that never before had our fire been so heavy in this comparatively peaceful locality. As was to be expected, such activity provoked a corresponding reply from the other side, and we soon began to feel that

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what might have been a model battery position under quiet conditions provided but little cover and shelter in face of hostile fire.

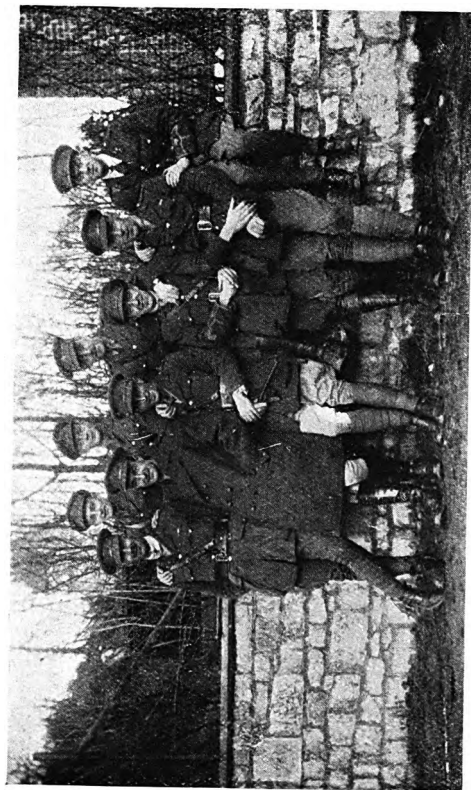
Remarks such as "party dispersed," "mostly O.K.'s on working party," "caused explosion," "five direct hits," "O.K. on ammunition pit causing great explosion," and "men seen to run" show that there was good reason for this retaliation. The civilians were a trifle alarmed but stuck pluckily to their homes. The town of Mazingarbe itself came in for a share, but the people were adepts in the art of disappearing quickly. One moment the people would be gossiping at their doors and the kiddies playing in the streets in full-throated joyousness. Then the whine of a shell would give warning and almost before the resultant crash everybody would be down the cellars.

The position at Philosophe continued to be heavily shelled. On the 22nd shelling commenced at 12.50 p.m. and was sustained well on into the evening. The two guns were both badly damaged. Several boxes of cartridges were ignited and one shell crashed into the roof of the magazine but did not penetrate. The shelling came from "Wingles" direction, and it was noticeable in this sector that if the enemy wished to carry out any particular programme of hate he generally chose a Sunday for such designs. One always looked forward to excitement when a Sunday dawned. The Philosophe position being practically untenable, the left section moved out and two guns were taken to Vermelles, but bad fortune continued with the left section even in their new quarters. Enemy kite-balloons were numerous and vigilant, and the battery was shelled with gas in the early morning of the 29th—which was a Sunday! Gunner Southall was badly wounded and gassed, but Bombardier J. Pallister, although suffering from the effects of gas himself, pluckily carried him to safety and Sergeant Day also accomplished good work under difficult conditions. Gunner Goodright was also

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removed to hospital. On April 30th, 200th Siege Battery were lodged in the château which stood in the immediate rear of the left flank gun. As if to welcome this arrival, the enemy sent three 8" crumps crashing into the château grounds about midday, the first of them wounding Wireless Operator C. R. Snelling in the hand and placing the wireless station out of action.

*May.* May opened unfortunately for both sections, Gunner G. Clutterbuck being killed and Bombardier J. Parry seriously wounded by a shell which burst in the Group headquarters. A Hun aeroplane watched this shoot. The first shell dropped in the château grounds and "shorts" were signalled down until the range had been found. At Vermelles, too, Gunner N. Franks was severely wounded in both legs by a small-calibre shell which burst practically at his feet. Indicative of the excellent work accomplished in April, it may be mentioned that the battery fired 12,230 shells during the month, by far the heaviest period up to date. It is enough to show that far from taking any rest after the strenuous Somme campaign, the guns did even harder work in this new sector. That firing had good results is irrefutable. Evidence from observation posts and aeroplanes go to prove that substantial damage was accomplished in enemy lines. Impromptu shoots on troublesome German batteries were carried on by aeroplane direction, and this "neutralising fire" invariably succeeded in silencing the target. One hostile battery numbered "H 32" was very often engaged, together with its neighbour "H 33." Though somewhat hazy, the weather cleared up and the district looked pretty under spring's belated appearance. On the morning of the 11th "H 32" was busy ranging on the railway in front of our position. Several shells fell near, one damaging No. 3 gun. In the afternoon, about 1.30 o'clock, the same battery again opened fire at the railways on the north and north-east side of the position. Two shells of this series fell in the château grounds, one



MR. LEACEY, MR. THORLEY, MR. SOUTHWELL, MR. FINCH,  
MR. BENNELL, MAJOR J. G. C. LEECH, MR. MINCHIN, MR. METCALFE,  
CAPT. G. GRICE.





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of them bursting three yards from the canteen and wounding Corporal H. Colenutt, Gunners J. Glennie, and J. Hilditch. Gunner A. Baldwin was seriously wounded by this shell and died before reaching the field ambulance. He was buried at Philosophe Cemetery near to Gunner Clutterbuck. Gunner H. Naylor was also conveyed to hospital suffering from shell-shock. A week of poor weather followed these unfortunate casualties, and less firing was done, but on the 22nd we fired in conjunction with a raid by the 10th Leicesters. Another big raid took place on May 28th, but later in the day the majority of the battery left for nine days' rest at Bethune. Everybody had a happy time in spite of bombing at night and occasional long-range shells which fell near the railway station. We played a football match in very warm weather and managed to beat 136th Heavies by two goals to nil. The battery returned on the evening of June 5th.

*June.* Soon after, Messines opened, and as usual other fronts gave vent to local attacks, and there was plenty of work. On the 28th a big bombardment started on the right and, in conjunction with these operations carried out by the 46th Division on Avions and the outskirts of Lens, we fired on hostile batteries.

*July.* July 1st came with recollections of the opening of the Somme offensive last year, and appropriately enough the battery fired its hundred-thousandth shell, since arriving on active service. It will be remembered that a battery of 9.2's came in for constant and severe handling near our old Philosophe position, and the fosse itself was often shelled as a probable observation post. On the night of July 3rd half-gun detachments proceeded to 126th Heavy Battery at Calonne, and on the 4th the exchange of positions was completed. The brief sojourn in this spot—for we reigned but three days—will not be easily forgotten by those who made the journey. The lorries set us down by the "Marble Arch," a much-battered bridge across the road, and

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men quickly distributed themselves in two streets—"Oxford Street" and "Regent Street." It was pleasing to hear such familiar names, but the places themselves, and indeed the whole locality, came far short of the real thing. The Germans appeared to enjoy an intimate knowledge of the immediate district, and matters assumed a distinctly uncomfortable aspect. The battery fired but 125 shells in this position, and on the 6th was heavily strafed by hostile 5.9" and 8" guns from 2 p.m. till 6 p.m., a Hun 'plane observing for general effect of fire. Fortunately only one man was wounded, Gunner T. Collom being badly hit in the right hand, and at night guns were drawn out and taken to the wagon-lines at Hersin. The "move out" was made in record time, and though some of the haulage was effected by tractors, the drivers performed excellent work in this quick transfer of guns and equipment. Not a man but was pleased to see the last of Calonne, even though it did boast of "Regent Street" and "Oxford Street."

*August.* The battery were now parked in reserve at Hersin, and officers and men were attached to other batteries in the line. Whilst on this duty the battery lost two very fine and capable young N.C.O.'s in Bombardier W. Rivett and Bombardier B. Woods. They were killed by shell-fire at Maroc, and we all felt this loss keenly, particularly as the two had been out since the commencement and were very popular with all ranks. Gunner C. Swift was badly wounded on the following day, one of his legs being shattered. These casualties were felt the more because they were sustained by men performing temporary duty with other units.

At this time our O.P. party took up quarters at Le Brebet in training for work in connection with the impending attack on Hill 70 by the Canadians. An experiment for maintaining communication between infantry and artillery was the purpose of the O.P.'s inclusion, and the respective merits of communication

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by wire and wireless were to be tested. Two accounts, one by Bombardier R. Richardson and the other by the late Bombardier A. Bray, have been preserved by the writer, and both go to show that experiments were really fruitless owing to the tornado of shell-fire which demolished practically everything in the forward area. Nevertheless it was a good effort, and it was not for the want of spirit and determination that results were hardly successful. In this attack 2nd Lieut. Banks received the Military Cross and Gunner D. W. Jones the Military Medal.

After a long spell at Hersin—there was no rest in a good deal of it—the battery moved to a new field of action, the objective this time being the shattered ruins of Vimy, where we took over from 145th Heavies. Ill-luck pursued us at the very start, for hardly had the men reached the gun-pits when a shell burst in the entrance of No. 1 and Gunner A. May, another fine man who had borne the heat and burden of the early days, was killed instantaneously. For heroic work in these moments of danger Sergeant G. Clark was awarded the Military Medal. Three gunners of 145th H.B. were also wounded by the same shell. At 7.15 the same evening we had to answer an S.O.S. from "Laurent Sector." Following this inauspicious arrival, we were ranged on by a Hun 'plane the next morning, about two hundred 5.9" and 8" shells falling in or near the position. The aeroplane reported signals by which it was evident that the enemy had the position well marked—the hostile observer went so far as to send down "gut" (good)—and in addition to stores, the B.C. post was completely destroyed just after a party had taken leave of it. Pits were therefore dug at Thelus, and a section were soon in operation at that place. A quiet week followed this burst, and the battery began to settle down. From the ridge one could see our pits behind the ruins of Vimy and Petit Vimy just below. The Lens-Arras road ran immediately on our left, and was

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under observation by the enemy. In front was the wreckage of Avion, and a little farther on commenced the desolation of Lens with its gas-sodden cellars.

*September.* On September 3rd Captain Eyden left the battery and transferred to the Royal Flying Corps as an observer. In Captain Eyden the battery lost a fine type of soldier and gentleman who put his whole enthusiasm and capabilities at the service of his King and country; he had gained the Military Cross in the salient days. It was with undisguised regret and sorrow that we subsequently heard that this gallant officer made the supreme sacrifice during an air fight.

As September 4th made its exit the Germans provided us no small excitement. The log-book reads:

"At 12 midnight the battery position and all around was heavily bombarded with gas-shells and a few lyddite and shrapnel mixed. This bombardment lasted half an hour and was just like a hailstorm. At 1.30 a.m. Fritz put up a similar bombardment which lasted until two in the morning. No one was hurt and no damage done."

It speaks well for the men who served the guns that the S.O.S. signal was faithfully answered during this enemy concentration. A hundred and thirty gas cases were treated in neighbouring batteries. Altogether the Germans entertained a peculiar dislike for Vimy village, and a gun opening from this district invariably resulted in heavy retaliation. The enemy was fond of concentrating under cover of smoke-screens. On the 11th we were again strafed by 5.9" and 8" howitzers from 11.10 a.m. till 1 o'clock. The shoot was observed by a hostile aeroplane using the wireless call "OW." Over two hundred shells came over, but though one pit was badly damaged and one gun put out of action, there were happily no casualties. The gunners started to build emergency gun-pits in reserved positions. We were subjected to interference on the Friday following. The log-book makes a record:

"From 8.55 a.m. to 10.40 a.m. battery was shelled by

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hostile battery 'OY2' (10.5 cm. howitzers), 150 rounds being sent over from the direction taken from No. 3 gun, 54 20 grid. From 8.55 a.m. to 9.10 a.m. observed by hostile aeroplane, whose call of 'NA' was picked up by the wireless operator."

Another period occurred on the 19th:

"From 8.37 a.m. to 9.25 a.m. battery shelled by hostile 10.5 cm. howitzer battery, 200 shells being sent over from the direction 56 grid.—observation made by hostile plane, whose call of 'DS' was picked up. No casualties."

From preparations behind the lines we were led to believe that an attack was forthcoming, and with the advent of more artillery in the neighbourhood the enemy did not have matters so much his own way. Our planes regained ascendancy, albeit an intrepid Hun ventured over on Thursday evening, the 27th, and succeeded in downing two kite balloons before being brought to earth himself. We were also shelled to the extent of 250 8" shells on the 28th, and one of the reserve pits was smashed in.

*October.* By this time men had made themselves fairly comfortable and tolerably safe dug-outs, and life was not too bad. The battery canteen will always be remembered. In an amazingly small space the leading spirits would crush for mutual consolation over mugs and dixies. The canteen was certainly worth visiting.

Papers gave encouraging details of the British attack at Passchendaele Ridge, but, contrary to our expectations, the 3rd Canadian Division was sent north and the 2nd Canadian Division relieved them. The artillery gave vent to a nightly hate, but otherwise little firing was done on account of the poor weather. A start was made on a concrete gun position at Vimy, but on October 30th the two guns were taken over by an advance party of 23rd Heavy Battery, and we proceeded on the line of march from La Targette.

*November.* Scottish Wood, between Voormezelle and Dickebusch, was reached, and on November 1st the

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battery received an unpleasant baptism of fire at its new quarters near Zillebeke. Those of us fresh to the salient thus had an early experience of its mud and shells. An evil-smelling and damp sap was the only protection from shell-fire, and many decided to be fatalistic on top rather than seek such refuge. Everywhere was mud and water, but the former concrete dug-outs of our 1915 tenure were seen as we came to this position. Often one would see the wooden crosses of heroes buried in the early days sunk to the tips by reason of the water and soft ground—a pathetic sight.

On the second morning of our arrival the battery vicinity was shelled and the telephone post, boasting but frail cover, received a direct hit. Bombardier Brownless and Gunners T. Rainbow and A. Fitch were killed and 2nd Lieut. C. P. du Heaume sustained severe concussion. It seemed only by some miracle of Fate that Mr. du Heaume escaped death, and one cannot explain these strange happenings by any scientific argument. Next day in the pretty cemetery of La Clytte the remains of three fine men were laid to rest. Sergeant Gordon, who had left us at Vimy for duties with another battery, rendered heroic service in connection with this incident, being stationed quite near at the time. It was only a week later that Sergeant Gordon himself was accidentally killed behind the lines.

Hostile fire was experienced on the 8th, and Gunner J. Seymour, D.C.M., was slightly wounded and wireless communication broken. The enemy seemed to adopt new tactics of sweeping fire which were rather disconcerting; one never knew where the next one was likely to drop. On Sunday, the 11th, Gunner D. Noctor was wounded in the hand, and Gunner T. Parkin was killed in the evening by a shell which burst close to the gun-pit. It was a time which tested the endurance of the stoutest. The task of the drivers in maintaining the supply of ammunition and rations was a hard one on account of the bad roads, and many a rider will

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remember the sigh of relief breathed when the plank road was finished on the return journey.

On the night of the 23rd a shell bursting near, wounded Sergeant W. J. Kitchener in the head and Bombardier J. Mallison in the thigh. Corporal J. Grainger and Gunner W. Radford, our worthy canteen manager, were also wounded on the 26th by a shell which fell close to the cookhouse. A splinter from the same projectile removed a fair proportion of the rim of Bombardier Whittaker's steel helmet, but luckily his person was untouched. On the night of the 29th, moreover, Gunners Grundy and Sandsby were burnt, the former very severely, by some cartridges which were set alight. These were the last of the casualties in November, during which 6,618 rounds were dispatched. At this time there were some lovely nights, and bombers were always very busy. On November 30th "harassing fire" came into vogue.

*December.* Réveillé on December 1st was effectively performed by an 8" shell which crashed into one of the sap entrances and caused a big displacement of timber and earth. At noon on December 3rd the New Zealanders in front went over for Polderhoek Château. All guns opened promptly and the objective was taken. An S.O.S. call in the afternoon gave scope for a quick burst, which showed that men were as keen as ever, despite the hard conditions. From December 5th the battery was engaged in salvage operations, and on the 10th Corporal Bulmer was wounded by a machine-gun bullet. On the 22nd the battery proceeded to the wagon-lines on rest, and the guns were drawn out from Zillebeke on the 29th. Snow fell during the Christmas week, but the weather was not allowed to interfere with the usual festivities. Though out of action, the drivers did carrying work for other batteries, and the severity of alternate frosts and thaws made movement very difficult.

Total number of rounds fired up to the end of 1917, 110,053.

\* \* \* \* \*

1918

*January.* The New Year dawned under the steel grip of ice, snow, and frost. It opened with President Wilson's enunciation of the famous fourteen points, and the Press was full of peace terms and war aims. Since the German comment on this was "that our answer is from our Western troops and U-boats," we were less sanguine about 1918 being a year of victory than we had been on January 1st, 1917, at Ovillers. Politics trouble soldiers on active service but little, and we had come to accept the war as a kind of institution and to look askance at these various rumours. A good number of men proceeded to the United Kingdom on leave in this month, and with so many away there was additional work for the few who were left. The social side was not forgotten, and in the afternoons time was found for football practice. On January 20th we beat a local A.S.C. unit by five goals to three, and on the 27th drew four-four with 152nd Heavy Battery in an exciting and enjoyable game. Mention must be made of 152nd Heavies because we had met them on our right in the mud of Zillebeke, and the two batteries were destined to fight side by side till the end of the war. There was a keen and good-natured rivalry between the two units on subsequent occasions. A battery concert followed on the next day, and towards the success we owed much to the enthusiasm and talent of Mr. J. B. Finch. Our officers and sergeants also beat a similarly representative team from 152nd H.B. by four goals to nil.

*February.* On February 3rd we started preparations for moving, and line of march was taken on the 4th to Zeggars-Cappel. Via Renescure, Fontes, Faux, and Maimel-st-Pol, the wagon-lines at St. Nicholas were reached, and on the 11th the battery came into action,



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taking over position from 31st H.B. near Athies. Little firing was done during February.

*March.* March commenced with easterly winds full of hail and snow. The weather slightly improved on the 6th, and at 2.25 a.m. a successful raid was made in front. Considerable artillery strength must have been disclosed, for later in the morning German air observers came to have a look round on several occasions. One got caught in a fine barrage of our "archies," and was forced to descend just in front. Generally speaking, the enemy did but little counter-battery work and remarkably little aeroplane shooting.

As the month progressed firing began to speed up, and particularly at night harassing fire was maintained in increasing quantities. There was no definite bombardment, but there was constant fire from all units in the neighbourhood. It was evident that both sides were on a constant *qui vive* for the slightest disposition of attack. They were anxious to "feel" each other at every available opportunity, and the smallest incident seemed to provoke a heavy artillery fire. The O.P. commanded a good view, and effective shooting was carried on from this vantage, parties of transport and men frequently being dispersed and damaged.

On March 21st the long-expected storm broke, and the German effort to finally smash the British Army began. Many batteries who had congratulated themselves that their position was unbeknown to the enemy were now disillusioned by a rain of gas-shells. Gas and high-explosive shells burst near our own guns, but, beyond some men feeling the effects of the gas, there were no actual casualties. At 6 p.m. guns were drawn out and taken to the wagon-lines at St. Nicholas. Throughout the momentous days which followed the battery was ever on the move, fighting, as other units, with its back to the wall. One retains vivid impressions of certain incidents, but the soldier in the ranks often worked with next to no knowledge of the tactical

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situation in front and on either hand. The spectator at home stood far more chance of knowing the truth. Local happenings were often misrepresented or exaggerated, but we dimly understood on this occasion that things had gone badly on the right, that the Germans had captured Bullecourt, and that we were part of the strength which was moving at quickest speed to stem the onrush. Early on the 22nd we moved off. The day was very hazy, and it was a tedious march in the hot sun. By night we had come into action at Boisleux-au-mont, passing on the way an Expeditionary Force Canteen in full flames. Rumour went that a high personage was walking round ordering units to quit, and a warning was issued to this effect. However, we got busy on the morning of the 23rd, firing into Mory, Mort Homme, St. Leger, and along the Vrancourt Road. Gunners Smith, Broomfield, and Orsmond, M.M., were wounded by pieces which flew from the T. tubes. Corporal Smith was injured in the same manner next day. Heavy firing continued, and on Palm Sunday, the 24th, there were many calls by wireless and S.O.S. orders from Brigade. A field battery on the left front was badly treated, and the enemy found the roads with his high-velocity guns with remarkable accuracy. We covered an arc of over 150 degrees to answer the various targets. One section fired well-nigh into our old position, and the other guns continued their attentions in Mory direction. In the afternoon a Y.M.C.A. hut was evacuated, and, quickly realising the situation, successful efforts for providing against any future shortage in rations were made by the detachments off duty. Artillery reinforcements began to arrive in rear, and the answer to an S.O.S. request at 8 o'clock in the evening must have considerably surprised the enemy. It was a fine sight to watch this particular display.

Notwithstanding, the Germans made further progress, and we pulled out at dusk on the 25th, leaving the wagon-lines at Boiry-st-Rictrude and coming into action again

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at an hour past midnight near Hendecourt. Hardly had the guns been placed in position and men found some Nisson huts for a few minutes' sleep when we were forced to move off again at 3.30 a.m. We reached another position at 11 a.m. on the 26th but evacuated it after dinner. The people were moving from the villages with as many goods and precious belongings as could be gathered together in the short time available, and the roads were crowded with traffic. Nothing could have urged soldiers to greater effort than the sight of these old men, women, and children who struck out for the hot white roads, reluctantly leaving their homes. We slept for a night at Bailleulmont, mostly huddled together under wagons, for the night was biting cold. On Wednesday, the 27th, we pulled out two, and finally four, guns to a position some thousand yards to the rear near Shrapnel Corner. We passed the Coldstreams digging hard and strengthening the old 1917 Arras front line. Finally the six guns were pulled into position just behind the small village of Ransart. The battery had the misfortune to lose Gunner J. Cooper on this day, a limber passing over his foot.

Plenty of rain added to the usual discomforts of this moving warfare, but the troops were in excellent spirits. Somehow we realised that the Germans had at last been stopped on this front and that operations were taking a better course than before. Almost immediately the guns got to work on roads north of Courcelles, and an early S.O.S. was responded to consequent on an enemy thrust east of Ayette. On the following day bivvies were reconstructed to better advantage, and the O.P. party and cookhouse fixed on the ruins of a château for their abode. On the 30th the guns were calibrated on Courcelles Church and some more harassing fire done at night. A couple of big shells coming over at 1.30 the next morning made most of us scurry, and one of them landed right on the road not three yards

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away from a party of gunners sleeping under a sheet of tarpaulin.

*April.* April opened with a lovely Easter Monday. We had a shoot by aeroplane on the 2nd, and though firing at over eleven thousand yards' range, there were good results. On the early morning of the 3rd a successful counter-attack was launched, and we captured Ayette, together with one hundred and fifty prisoners. It was an encouraging sign. The 5th and 6th suggested that the enemy had a dim idea of our existence or that we were in line for one of his programme targets. Plenty of harassing fire was put on dumps, valleys, and hutments, and counter-battery targets began to flow in from wireless sources. Hereabouts we struck on a period of bad weather, but there was plenty of digging to be done and a deal of firing by night.

When the weather cleared both sides were very active in the air. Three bombers sailed over one afternoon but met with such a hot reception from our anti-aircraft guns that they let their bombs fall on waste ground and were evidently relieved to return. Another fighter, more successful, compelled the occupants of a kite-balloon in rear to descend. On the 13th Sir Douglas Haig issued his famous "back to the wall" message to the Army. We endeavoured to do our best to support it to the tune of some five hundred rounds per day. One target, known as "Courcelles Concentration," came in for particular attention. On April 20th "C" and "D" subsections moved to Bienvillers, which was kept as a "silent" position. The remaining guns whiled away time by firing over three hundred gas-shells at hostile trenches. Gunner J. Goodwin was killed at Bienvillers on the 26th whilst carrying water for the men's dinner. In the faithful performance of subsidiary duties in the firing-line men have often given their lives cheerfully that the lot of the gunners should be bettered. So, doing his little bit, died Joe Goodwin.

April finished as dismally as it had begun bright. Clouds

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hung at five hundred feet, and there was a lot of mist and rain. Such periods were apt to be very depressing; and perhaps the soldier often wished we could have finished the war by one grand and final burst of firing. For one day's excitement or progress there are dozens of dreary, drab intervals when time hangs heavily.

*May.* The enemy sent some well-directed shells into the ravine in rear of the guns on the morning of May 5th, killing six horses and wounding two men. A new extractor made from the old Martini lock was used on the guns about this time in place of the T-tube, and was fairly successful and easy to manipulate. The bridges and wells near the village were mined to give the enemy every obstacle should he make progress.

Work carried on from "Albatross" O.P. made good strides whenever weather permitted. Parties of men and transport were engaged, and any movement which excited the least suspicion was tested in a very practical manner. Concentrated attention to a collection of German batteries near Logeast Wood was given by all guns in the brigade from 2 p.m. till 6 p.m. The reply was very weak, and at night the air was full of the hum of our 'planes going over to supplement this work by tactics on targets out of gun range. The battery was shelled on the 17th, but happily there were no casualties. A period of overbearing heat was broken by a storm which gave way to more rain and mist. Such Continental editions of the daily paper that reached us estimated that for the coming attack the Germans would place a hundred and forty divisions in the field and that we were opposed on this front by the 7th German Army between Givenchy and Bucquoy, under Von Bulow. Their probable objectives were to threaten Amiens and the Amiens-Clermont Railway, force the evacuation of the Ypres Salient, and separate the Franco-British Forces, thus forcing the evacuation of Northern France so as to realise the cherished dream of submarine bases in the Channel. There was plenty of artillery preparation

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to back up this boast, and many neighbouring batteries were heavily shelled, the enemy being aided by the mist.

*June.* These efforts continued well into June, but we were holding our own in counter-battery work. The following order gave much satisfaction and encouragement :

"In May the 6th Corps carried out the greatest number and the most successful aeroplane shoots ever known during one month since the beginning of hostilities."

On June 4th a battery sports meeting was held at Bailleulmont and some good form was shown. The tug between gunners and drivers produced an excellent pull, the drivers finally retiring victors of a long struggle.

On the 5th the Germans conducted an aeroplane shoot on 276 S.B., a battery of 6" howitzers in front. Two of their series fell right into our position without doing any harm. "C" and "D" subsections were relieved by "E" and "F" on June 9th at the peaceful Bienvillers position—peaceful only from the standpoint of our own silence, for occasionally the enemy was very active in this quarter. When German batteries opened out they were invariably spotted by our R.E. eight observation 'planes, who hovered about to report general corrections of fire, and we were often rewarded by "mostly O.K." messages. At 11.49 on the night of June 22nd we fired on counter-battery targets in support of a tank raid—the first time tanks went over at night. There was a glorious moon, and the approach of the tanks was covered by machine-gun barrage. Important objectives were taken in this surprise attack, though scores of broken wires were left in the path of the tanks and occasioned linesmen not a little work in re-establishing communication. During the latter part of this month there was a spread of sickness, particularly in the wagon-lines. It took the form of an influenza fever, categorised by the medical authorities as "pains of an unknown origin." Over forty men were affected,

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and the guns were practically isolated from the horse-lines.

In June we fired over six thousand rounds.

*July.* July 1st was reminiscent of July 1st, 1916, a brilliant sun and hot day. A counter-battery bombardment took place at night.

The Americans made their appearance on this front for training purposes. Rumours of German offensives farther south came through, but everything indicated that the Allies were holding the enemy, and captured German documents were beginning to acknowledge the strength of the American Army in France. Our Corps was sending over two hundred tons of shells every day on counter-battery work alone, and the tide of battle seemed to be on the turn. There was a terrific bombardment on our right on the night of July 19th, and the Guards took two villages in this attack. Another concentration on guns in Logeast Wood took place in half-hour bursts on the afternoon of the 22nd, and this was followed by a successful raid in front at night. Over three hundred prisoners were taken in these local efforts and at the expense of but nineteen casualties. "E" and "F" sub-sections came back from Bienvillers on the 27th with good reports of the hospitality of the inhabitants who still kept to their homes in the village. At 10.40 p.m. on the 29th a raid was made by the 2nd Division to the right of Courcelles, and signs came from everywhere that the enemy was losing spirit all along the front. Seven thousand four hundred and twenty-eight shells were fired in July. "AZ 16"—a hostile battery with a long range—caused some trouble towards the end of the month. He could fire into Bailleulmont, and indeed on one occasion obliged the drivers to clear out their horses in double-quick time. This gun also ventured its spite against La Couchie, but as the Headquarters of the Brigade were fixed in this town, "AZ 16" was always promptly dealt with on these occasions!

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*August.* The date had now arrived when, more than merely stemming the great German offensive, it was apparent that the rôle of attacker would once more be changed, and that the push of the enemy might even roll back from sheer exhaustion. Not only did reports of other fronts encourage this idea, but we felt it ourselves. Every day saw the dispatch of series of annihilating, neutralisation, concentration or counter-battery fire. At a stage in warfare when science made it practically impossible to conceal at least the approximate position of guns, it was remarkable that we were allowed to harass the enemy to such an extent without meeting more retaliation. It was a tribute to the effective counter-battery work of the Corps. A new call was established in wireless work to obtain a combined crash of fire from all units within range on any troublesome enemy battery, and other interesting features were equally calculated to completely smother the German artillery.

On Wednesday morning, August 7th, a working party immediately in rear were seen by a hostile aeroplane. Unfortunately one shell burst near "A" sub's gun, killing Gunner Temple-Wood and wounding Gunners T. Pope, Sansby, and Rippon, in addition to two Field Artillery drivers passing at the time. On August 9th we fired over a thousand rounds in harassing fire on roads and tracks, and conducted a counter-battery shoot by air observation. Further, we caused a big fire in a shoot on enemy headquarters, though "E" sub had a premature about fifty yards in front of the gun. A raid at 2.30 p.m. brought in some fifty prisoners. On the night of the following day "E" sub had another premature—this time in the bore of the gun—but very luckily nobody was hurt. Even though no definite advance had started, the enemy were gradually yielding ground from this front down to Achiet, retiring in forty-eight-hour stages. Our 'planes were doing a fair amount of infantry contact patrol—a hopeful sign for



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the future. Two thousand infantry on the move in Logeast Wood were spotted by aeroplane and vigorously strafed. Calibration was also carried out by the Field Survey Company.

Thus we come to August 21st, 1918, a day which was the beginning of advances which never ceased until November 11th. The bombardment opened at 4.55 a.m. Notwithstanding the Allied recovery since the enemy's March offensive, few of us dreamt at this precise moment of attack that these first shots were the commencement of a series of victories which would go far to break down a mighty empire within the space of three months.

On account of a heavy morning mist, support from the air was not possible at first, and the battery left the Ransart position at 8 a.m. and came into action at Douchy-les-Ayette, passing on the way batches of prisoners amounting to about one hundred and fifty. By 10 a.m. the sun had broken through the mist, and fighters, scouts, and observation 'planes were soon in evidence, ready to take the first chance of communication and co-operation. Nor were the Germans inactive in the air. An enemy fighting 'plane chased an R.E. 8 observation machine almost to the ground and within a few yards of our hastily prepared position. Soon observation was good and wireless calls began to come in from the eager ever-watchful hawks above. Despite the terrible heat and the harder conditions of working, the guns replied to every relevant wireless call sent down on this memorable day. The men answered to this extra demand on brain and muscle in a manner worthy of the battery. Fusing, ramming home, laying, loading, lengthening and firing—it was fine to witness such work from men who had already borne the brunt of nearly four years' warfare. With them, and just as enthusiastic, were the men of Kitchener and Derby, volunteers in the cause of Justice and keen to aid in such a battle. All were joyful that the comparative inactivity of five

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months of trench warfare was at last broken and that the advance which removed this stagnation was in the right direction. Supply tanks came lazily back from forward tasks, and prisoners bore their wounded and also our own comrades along the hot, dusty road. A Sopwith crashed south of the village at 2 p.m., but our 'planes were doing really fine work in the air, picking out parties of infantry, flashes of guns, and movement of transport for the benefit of the artillery. Within a small area were crowded four batteries; 152 heavies and 276 siege were on our left and 336 siege on the right. Further along the valley to the left flashes and reports evidenced the strength of support, and though news came that the Guards had been badly handled near the railway in front, all were confident that this initial bombardment had not been without success.

At night—a glorious night—both sides were busy with their bombing machines. The enemy hovered over the artillery, ready to dive down should a gun be audacious enough to fire. A spell of silence followed the whistles of warning till “152,” becoming impatient, opened on our left, thereby incurring the raider’s anger to the extent of four bombs, uncomfortably near. On the 6th Corps front 485 prisoners were captured, and on the sector attacked by the 4th Corps, 1,300.

Early morning of the 22nd gave promise of another fine day, and a slight breeze made the air less hot and distressing. Reports varied as to our progress, but evidently we had done well on both Corps fronts. A high-velocity gun enfilading the town kept up a continual harassing fire, and a shell from the same gun fell into “336’s” position, killing the officer commanding, Major Woodward, and wounding two other officers. In the brief periods off duty men dug rough sleeping-places for the night. Shell-holes were enlarged, levelled, and sheets of tarpaulin thrown over, quite enough preparation for men tired out with the exertions of a heavy day’s work. As soon as the last 'plane droned

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back on account of the failing light, so the roads began to crowd with traffic. Lorries, tanks, guns, and men were moving forward, a seemingly ceaseless passage of activity under the cloak of darkness. The night, save for periodical strafes by both sides, was fairly quiet. During the day we had fired 1,655 rounds, thus far a battery record. The 23rd opened with an attack at 4 a.m., starting up north towards Monchy and gradually extending along the whole front. Second and third attacks followed at 8.50 and 11 a.m., and a counter-attack was beaten off. So far our infantry had advanced over 9,000 yards. This day's work was responsible for the dispatch of 1,633 rounds. At 3.30 p.m. the battery moved to near Ablainzevelle. One gun was overturned in arriving owing to the rough ground, but it was speedily righted. Black clouds heralded rain, but under wagons, in old huts or improvised tents, and enjoying the warmth and tonic of a rum issue, we hastened to snatch a few hours of sleep before an early departure on the morrow. On this day the 62nd Division joined the 6th Corps, the initial assaults having been carried through by the Guards and 2nd and 3rd Divisions.

An early réveill  and breakfast on August 24th enabled us to be in action by 7.30 a.m. off the road leading from Ablainzevelle to Courcelles-le-Comte and about a thousand yards from the latter town. The march forward was completed without incident, though the Germans kept playing on the roads with high-velocity guns. Plenty of artillery and transport was on the move and, what was still more pleasing, the cavalry, with their extra feeds and loads of equipment, passed in force.

On this move we had first-hand evidence of the effect of our harassing fire. "Jimmy Harrison" (an affectionate term for harassing fire) had been such a stock phrase at Ransart that it was good to note the number and accuracy of so many shell-holds near roads and tracks. From our fresh position we could see Courcelles in front, a mass of twisted trees and broken ruins, and

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our minds went back to the old order of "Courcelles Concentration." As the day progressed the sun shone out with all his power, and a line of dead horses immediately in front of the battery drew forth caustic comments from the gunners. In some cases these poor beasts had to be buried before the mules of the Field Artillery could be persuaded to proceed. On the left of the road were two trench mortars and a quantity of ammunition, left in haste by the retreating Germans. Here and there were isolated machine-gun posts, and, tribute to the enemy, many of his men had fought and died in a manner which compelled admiration. On the morning of August 25th our reinforced infantry took Sapignies, Mory, and Behagnies, and soon after noon we were again on the forward trek. The day was extremely hot and the stench of dead horses and men as we moved towards Courcelles was wellnigh insufferable. Hardly a square yard of this town had escaped our shell-fire, and the roads were ankle-deep in brick-dust. The Germans had had a dump in the town—at least one concluded so—for everything was one mass of scattered wreckage. Passing beyond Courcelles, we dropped trails on the left of the road leading to Ervillers, a position previously occupied by two hostile howitzers of 5.9" calibre. "Silent Jim" continued his attentions to the town in rear, and one or two shells falling short added a touch of excitement to the proceedings.

At night it rained heavily, not very inspiring to men sleeping and working on top. The railway bank in front showed equal determination by our men and stubborn resistance on the part of the enemy. The King's Loyal Lancs had suffered badly, and farther on many Germans lay dead within a small area. We heard of the capture of Monchy-le-Preux to the north and Contalmaison down south.

Another step forward on Tuesday, August 27th, brought us to the other side of Gomiecourt. The stores and equipment left in dug-outs showed hasty retreat

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on the enemy's part, and men off duty got to work "scrounging." We had been very short of cigarettes since the advance, and some German cigars and tobacco proved poor substitutes. On the whole it was a fairly clean battlefield, and at least the enemy had shown extraordinary energy in removing men and guns. Here and there were traces of fierce struggles between tanks and machine-gun posts, the latter having been left behind to retard our advance and allow of the retreat of the enemy's main body of infantry. A Bosche aeroplane over just as we were having tea came in for a warm reception from Gunner Gallagher's Lewis gun, and a word for Paddy's guardianship of the battery from hostile 'planes throughout his long service is not amiss at this juncture.

Two guns went up forward, but apparently came under balloon observation, for they received a strafing. An interesting discovery was a German artillery map found in a dug-out. It showed very clearly our old position at Ransart, and the only mistake made was that the officers' quarters were marked as a gun-pit. The four guns moved forward in the evening of August 29th and joined the other two guns west of Mory, to which the enemy was paying scant respect. We were near enough to be under observation, but no camouflage was attempted or fire lessened in this tonic of active service experience. In these first twenty-eight days of August we fired 11,523 shells, but after this date daily and monthly records of targets and shells cease in the battery log-book. The total is available, however, and works out at 30,583 shells fired from this day till the cessation of hostilities. This gives a monthly average of 13,168 shells, a higher rate than we had ever attained previously. Another stunt on a wide front commenced at 5 a.m. on the 30th, and by breakfast-time enemy prisoners were coming down bearing our wounded. Many of them were only too willing to exchange masters, and had had their kits packed in readiness. A message

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from headquarters in the afternoon intimated that we had gained important high ground and that the 5th Division were advancing rapidly. Whippet tanks and batches of prisoners came along the road throughout the busy day. "E" and "F" subs went forward to south of Mory and not far from the Arras-Bapaume Road. We joined them the next day and helped to beat off a strong counter-attack.

*September.* September opened with an early morning bombardment. We got quite used to early attacks and night raids. During the day there were a great number of wireless targets, the 'planes spotting transport activity in Cambrai, Pronville, and Ruyalville. Artillery fire and harassing machine-gun fire from the air must have converted this transport into a veritable confusion. An advance of four thousand yards by the Durhams was the result of the morning's attack, and we were soon able to move to near Morchies and from thence to Doignies. Our guns lay in the valley, but from the ridge behind was a fine view of Bourlon Wood and the spire of Cambrai Church. The enemy enjoyed a temporary success during our stay, recapturing some front trenches. His attack was supported by a violent counter-battery effort, and Gunner Batchelor was hit in the leg by a shell which dropped near one of the guns. Although in great pain, he continued to lay his gun until the shoot was finished.

We were now covering the 3rd Division, which included the Gordon Highlanders, Suffolks, and Hants, and on the night of September 26th we moved up to the Canal du Nord near Hermies. On the morning of the 27th opened up the second big phase of the Cambrian battle. It was a terrific bombardment, reminiscent of the old Somme days. This attack, fought by the 3rd Guards, 62nd and 2nd Divisions, covered the name of the 6th Corps with imperishable glory. They pierced the Hindenburg support system and forced a passage nearly to the Canal de l'Escaut, with the capture of

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many prisoners and guns. Such success enabled the artillery to move forward quickly, and on the next day we took four guns to near Flesquies. At one stage advance was so rapid that our infantry effected the capture of seven 77 mm. guns, turned them round and summoned artillerymen to fire into the backs of the retreating enemy. In such quick time, however, that the flashes were at first reported by aeroplanes as hostile guns. An immediate message from Headquarters rectified this error.

Bourlon Wood, with its frayed edges, lay directly to the north, a dumb testimony to the chaos that shells can produce. Another bombardment followed on the next morning, and in the afternoon we again took to the trail and stopped just below Marcoing, a heap of ruins on a desolate hill. The good news from other fronts added a tonic of encouragement to the hard work and recompensed for the discomforting rain at night. Our guns were by the side of the canal, and unlimited water was one great blessing of the position.

*October.* At this stage the Germans put up a fine resistance at Rumilly, probably to cover their retreat, but a terrific barrage on October 1st succeeded in dislodging them from the town, and by October 3rd we had taken up quarters near Rumilly Château, which the enemy had used as a blockhouse. It bore abundant evidence of the fact. We passed by the horrid stench of Marcoing on the way, and from thence through a lovely ravine untouched by war and strangely reminiscent of a Kent or Surrey Lane. On the battlefield such rare spots are as oases in the desert.

This Rumilly position proved a rather lively one, and served to remind us that the retreating forces could still show sting. The 152nd Heavies on our right were severely strafed, and the Germans showed more enterprise in the air. We came under fire on the 5th, and Gunner-Fitter Brown, Gunners Lane, Dunbobbin, and Jack were wounded. Gunner J. Hamer, acting as

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medical orderly, preserved admirable coolness and devotion in attending to these and other cases throughout the advance, and was subsequently awarded the Military Medal. On October 7th Bombardier W. Hobbs was wounded in the leg, happily not seriously. The writer begs to be excused the introduction of a personal note if he mentions two men in the battery who were his companions on wireless work for fairly long periods. They were Corporal W. Preston and Bombardier W. Hobbs, and the writer were an ingrate did he not pay some humble tribute to the keenness and zeal of these two comrades in the carrying out of this not unimportant feature of battery work.

The third phase of the Cambrian battle opened at 4.30 a.m. on October 8th. Our infantry reached the first and second objectives but were driven back from the second by tanks. At 12.15 p.m., however, a message came through to say that the final objectives had been attained and that the infantry could be seen going through Niergnies. Fifteen hundred prisoners were taken and most of them were very dejected and presented but sorry specimens. One batch were captured with some pigeons and were in such low spirits and poor condition that a high authority sent one of the birds back with a note to the effect that the men weren't worth taking.

The battery moved at noon on the 9th, passing south-east of the burning town of Cambrai, which was finally captured on this day. Along the roads parties of prisoners were engaged in burying their dead under the direction of our Padres. Pulling through Seranvillers, we got to work at La Targette, where the enemy was actively shelling the road to Wambaix. Carnieres was the next stopping-place and was reached on the 10th. We had come into what had previously been the German billeting area, and though within the houses were in a state of confusion, Carnieres was a fine town, and this was ground not held by us since 1914. There were



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plenty of vegetables in the vicinity, and they made a welcome change from the eternal bully and biscuits.

Early the next morning we were on again, making a temporary halt at Boussieres, bedecked everywhere with the beloved tricolour of La France. We dropped into action just west of St. Hilaire, where the civilians were selling coffee and wine. Many of them were taken back in cars and lorries. In the confusion on the other side some of our men made good their escape after being prisoners since Mons, and most of the shells which fell sounded very "tired," as though the enemy were firing at extreme range. Crowds of refugees came through the town on the way to safer areas. Many of them came from Haussy, and still more were waiting at St. Python. Meanwhile two of the guns had proceeded forward to near St. Vaast in a very open position near the road. On the night of the 19th the Guards passed through the town on their way to the front line, and on the morning of the 20th at 2 a.m. they attacked in conjunction with the 62nd Division. Although the assault was made in the dark and despite the pitiless rain, the River Selle was crossed and our line carried two miles beyond.

Solesmes was also captured and quantities of stores taken. "E" sub-gun fired nearly 500 rounds during this day.

By the morning of October 22nd we had reached St. Python, and were chatting to civilians who ate, with considerable relish, the rice and biscuits which the battery cook found for them. In the last few days, the Germans had ordered occupants downstairs whilst they helped themselves in the top rooms to whatever valuables they could lay hands on.

The pace of the advance demanded a maximum of work and determination from all ranks, for the roads were in a shocking condition. Nevertheless we moved forward to Escarmain on the 25th, where a respected soldier in Sergeant Cuthbert, M.M., of 276th Siege Battery, was killed. He had served with us during the first part of the advance.

*November.* Four guns were moved to Capelle to

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support the 17th Corps bombardment, and on November 3rd the battery reached Ruesnes in preparation for what was to prove the last big attack in which we took part. The assault started at 5 a.m. to the accompaniment of a violent artillery bombardment, and in this attack the Guards and 62nd Divisions reached the Sambre. In spite of a determined stand at Quesnoy, the 62nd Division captured a thousand prisoners and nine guns. The 5th of November still found us moving forward. We stayed to water at Gommegnies, the inhabitants welcoming us with free coffee, and the girls in best costumes waving appreciation in no uncertain fashion. All were relieved that the occupation had come to such a happy ending. We dropped trails in a small orchard two kilometres beyond the town on the northern edge of the Forêt de Mormal. Most of the gunners slept in the loft of a small farm-house. Madame had lost her son the previous day by the fragment of a shell which burst in the road and went through the window. It was sad to see the joy of relief tempered by such a tragic incident, but the men did what was possible to help in the simple burial rites.

The weather was very indifferent, and on the 5th and 6th it rained almost continuously. Most of the Siege artillery could not make the heavy going on the poor roads, but though the weather was still bad we made a detour on account of a bridge blown up in front, and came to Obies on the 7th.

It was at Obies that the battery fired its last shot from the muzzle of "B" sub-section gun, which had been the first to open in the far-off days of September, 1914. This shot completed 180,904 rounds of ammunition fired throughout the Great War by the battery. The civilians everywhere were pleased to see us and heartened our progress by cups of coffee, about all they had to offer. They told how they had smuggled in aeroplane messages telling of our advance.

On the morning of the 9th commenced our final line of march, and we heard that the 3rd battalion of Grenadier

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Guards, commanded by Viscount Lascelles, had entered Maubeuge at 3 a.m. Finally on the 11th of November came a message from headquarters 84th Brigade.

"To Deepcar. 8.45 a.m.

"Hostilities cease at 11 a.m. to-day. No intercourse to be maintained with the enemy. Any Germans entering our lines will be taken prisoners. BATLEY."

Congratulatory messages came from General Hon. Sir J. H. Byng, K.C.B., K.C.M.G., M.V.O., commanding the 3rd Army, from Lieut.-General Sir Aylmer Haldane, K.C.B., D.S.O., commanding the 6th Corps, and from Brigade-General A. Ellershaw, commanding Heavy Artillery, 6th Corps. Of some 67,000 prisoners and 800 guns captured by the 3rd Army, the 6th Corps claimed nearly 21,000 prisoners and 355 guns, together with 4,000 machine-guns and vast quantities of stores. The final advance from August 21st covered sixty-nine miles and the retaking of nearly a hundred villages.

As a unit acting in this final phase the battery took part in all the big engagements and, by dint of tremendously hard work, the guns kept well to the fore right up to the last day. To maintain such swift progress depended on the earnestness of the drivers, and no gunners could have had finer backing. In the care and supervision of the horses during this time, and indeed extending over a long period of service with the battery, the name of Captain Geoffrey Grice, M.C., comes into prominence. Under his guidance the battery came to possess one of the best conditioned set of horses in France, horses that were well in front whenever a chance offered of their appearance at any display or show.

The leadership of the battery during this particularly difficult time fell to an officer who had commanded our respect and admiration from the days of Thiepval, when Captain J. G. C. Leech was appointed commander of the battery. Mere words fail to express the appreciation which is demanded in writing of a gentleman so loyal in duty and fearless in action as was Major Leech. That

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we got through, doing so much damage and suffering so little ourselves, was due to his tactful skill and unerring judgment. That we were heartened during periods when it was easy to see fear and difficult to keep a stout spirit, was, times out of number the result of example from a leader who seemed callously indifferent to the chances of Fate. The ridges of the Somme, Calonne, the baptism of fire in the mud and stench of Zillebeke, and the pleasant verdure of Ransart, all recall instances of this noble example.

The gunners and observation party responded to the extra demands in their usual fashion. Guns were often brought in under cover of darkness in the short days of October and November, and trying experiences were of frequent occurrence. Yet the influx of new blood to the ranks of the gunners could not help but catch the spirit of older hands, and the additional work met with willing response from all quarters. Where the roads often impeded the heavier Siege artillery, it was possible for the field guns and 60-pounders to get ahead. Thus there was no respite up to the very last, and it was noteworthy that the announcement of the armistice fell on listless ears, for all ranks were wellnigh exhausted by the continuous strain and poor supply of food. Men do not cheer on empty stomachs.

A word, too, for those who kept the guns in action. Guns have little ways of their own, and even in normal periods require careful supervision in order that the best results may be obtained from them. Mobile warfare adds inconceivable difficulties to this task, but the fact that throughout the retreat and the advance they were kept in action whenever humanly possible reflects no little credit on the work which fell to Staff-Sergeant Fitter R. D. Wood and his men. It was a duty which demanded not only technical skill but continual resource and indefatigable energy.

From the main roads there issued a constant stream of refugees and prisoners of all descriptions—men, women

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and children whom the Germans had perforce released to help solve their food problem. Old and young alike told the same tale without speaking, a story of hard work and ill-nourishment in recent months. There were Britishers, French and Belgians dressed in different garbs of varying shabbiness, and even Italians once taken prisoner on the Piave and brought up through Austria, Germany and Belgium. Towards the end of operations the battery suffered a good deal from sickness, and a large proportion of men were obliged to proceed down the line under the ravages of influenza. This epidemic lasted throughout November, attacking men with unusual severity, and unhappily the battery lost some fine soldiers. Bombardier A. Bray died in hospital after leaving the battery at St. Python, sacrificing a young life full of promise and bright hope within a day or two of victory, after being with the unit from the time of its arrival in France. Gunners R. Binks, J. Doherty, J. Crow and J. Cox were others who fell victims to this dread malady, good men and staunch comrades buried in the kindly soil of La France.

The following is a list of honours gained in addition to those mentioned on page 83.

Captain G. Grice, O.B.E., M.C.

Lieut. Banks, M.C.

Sergeant G. Clark, M.M.

Sergeant J. Webb, D.C.M.

Sergeant E. Holland, M.M.

Sergeant A. R. Hooper, D.C.M., French Croix de Guerre.

Corporal J. Swinburne, M.M.

Bombardier D. W. Jones, M.M.

Bombardier Davies, M.M.

Gunner S. Swindells, M.M.

Gunner C. Fleming, M.M.

Gunner J. Hamer, M.M.

Driver H. Trowbridge, M.M.

Seven of these honours were gained in the final advance.

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Time does not serve to enlarge on each incident connected with these awards, but without any invidious distinction mention might be made of the excellent work as linesmen of Gunner S. Swindells and Corporal J. Swinburne. Gunner C. Fleming, in charge of the water supply during the final operations, also accomplished good work under hard conditions. From day to day a drop of "pawney" was God's own wine in the sweltering heat of action. Gunner J. Hamer's was a well-deserved honour; in the capacity of medical orderly he was ever handy when occasion needed.

As has been previously remarked, the few honours are a reflex of the work of the whole battery in that all ranks co-operated towards the ultimate object in the hard dull grind of continual duties. Some day the soldier of the Great War may be forgotten, but there is surely in each of us the sense of having done something in a great cause. That is worth a lot, the recollection of having done one's little duty.

On December 13th we were again on the line of march, this time with more peaceful obligations and intentions. We reached Marchienne-au-Pont via Binche in two days, and a day's rest was taken. From thence we trekked to Wanfercée—Baulet and St. Servais, finally reaching our destination near the small town of Sclaigneaux on the afternoon of December 18th. The first Peace Christmas was made worthy of its significance by a generous repast and excellent concert, and soon plans for demobilisation commenced. Men left in small groups, and the battery said good-bye to many well-known faces. We should have preferred to go home as a battery for a jolly wind-up rather than bidding adieu to comrades in this manner.

On February 4th the battery entrained to take its place in the Rhine Army of Occupation. Good quarters were secured at Bonn, and buildings installed with electric lighting. During the period of occupation Gunner H. Broomfield succumbed to an attack of influenza, and we thereby lost one who ever had a cheery word and a quiet devotion to duty.

Demobilisation proceeded briskly, and the unit was

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decreased to a Cadre of two officers and thirty-five other ranks. In March orders were received to further reduce the cadre strength and return to England. Finally Bonn was left on May 19th, 1919, and, after a stay of six days at Antwerp, Acting Captain S. T. Bennell, D.C.M., and twenty-three other ranks landed at Tilbury on May 20th. Out of this party there were eleven other ranks besides Mr. Bennell who had left England with the battery some four years and eight months previously. The members were as follows :

Sergeant A. R. Hooper, D.C.M.

Sergeant G. Mulley.

Sergeant E. Holland, M.M.

Sergeant J. F. Smith.

Sergeant J. Goodson.

Sergeant E. Atmer.

Sergeant J. Swinburne, M.M.

Bombardier G. Hill.

Bombardier J. Liddle.

Gunner R. Berrill.

Gunner McCutcheon.

Bombardier B. Dewey also joined the battery in the early stages and was included in the party. Entraining for Shoreham, the battery proceeded to hand over all guns and stores and was eventually sent to Aldershot to be reformed for service abroad. Two old members, Gunners Wagstaff and Green, rejoined the battery at Aldershot.

These men are now in India's sunny climes, where, let us hope, the name and fame of "24th Heavies" will be still further enhanced. If the new members approach in zeal and devotion the spirit of the men who helped to hurl nearly five thousand tons of material over the line during a long and bitter crusade against the might of Germany, there can be no doubt on this point.

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